Interview with James E. Taylor

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

JAMES E. TAYLOR

Interviewed by: Charles Stuart Kennedy

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Q: Today is December 5, 1995 and this is an interview with James E. Taylor. Could you tell me a little about when and where you were born?

TAYLOR:I was born in 1938 in Oklahoma. My family was probably small town businessmen and farmers from Oklahoma. During the war my father was in the Army and we traveled around during the early part a great deal.

Q: What had your father been before the war?

TAYLOR: A school teacher and coach in a small town in Oklahoma. He was an extremely good athlete so coached football, basketball, baseball, etc. In 1943 he was shipped out to the Pacific and so my mother took my older sister and me to Los Angeles to await his return. He didn't return. His plane went down in the Philippines very, very close to the end of the war. The plane was not found for four years. In 1949, when they were able to do some forensic identification, they shipped the remains of the crew back to the States. One of my earliest memories of making a major trip was back to St. Louis for the funeral, because they decided to have a mass burial in St. Louis because most of the crew was from that part of the country. My mother and her two children stayed in Los Angeles. I

grew up in L.A. It was a great place to grow up in the 1950s, and a dreadful place now, in my opinion.

Q: Where, in the Long Beach area?

TAYLOR: Yes, the Long Beach area. After high school I attended USC, University of Southern California. I floundered around for a major for awhile. I started out as engineering and got to unreal numbers and found I couldn't handle them, so decided science was not my field. I switched to architecture for a year. And then saw in one counseling session at USC that there was a major in international relations. And given my own interest in history, I said, “Gee, that would be an interesting thing.” I talked to one of the professors and they said I would study political science, area studies, languages and things like that. So, finally I settled on that and got a BA in it and continued on for a year.

Q: You graduated from USC when?

TAYLOR: In 1960 and continued on for a year in graduate school and finished in 1961. By that time I was under pressure from the draft. There was no question I had to do military service of some kind. In my day, at my age, there was no such thing as a student deferment. So, I decided to try to make the best of whatever years were needed to complete this obligation and instead of being drafted I chose to do four years as an officer in the Air Force. The Air Force offered me not only OCS but a career specialty in intelligence. So, the combination to me seemed worth four years as opposed to two years as a GI.

Q: What sort of training did you get and where were you stationed?

TAYLOR: OCS was done in San Antonio, in Lackland Air Force Base, the major training base for the Air Force. After OCS I did specialized training of about three months in photo interpretation, targeting, in effect deciding where to drop hydrogen bombs and things of that sort. So, as a 2nd Lieutenant, I was sent to a SAC wing in Wichita Falls, Texas.

Q: SAC being Strategic Air Command.

TAYLOR: Yes, it was a B-52 wing. My job was to brief the aircrews basically on their targets, but primarily on what we used to call E&E, escape and evasion, if they in fact were shot down somewhere over the Soviet Union, where would they aim for to be picked up, or to escape. There was a lot of unreality about this, of course. This was all to be done after a nuclear exchange, so one would doubt that too many of these crews would survive.

Q: What was the attitude of the crew? Here you were giving this sort of lecture and they knew what they were carrying.

TAYLOR: I don't know if you recall an old movie, “Dr. Strangelove”?

Q: “Dr. Strangelove” does come to mind with this list of things that the bombardier, or whoever it was, reads off.

TAYLOR: Right. There was a great scene where Slim Pickens, one of the pilots, goes down to dislodge one of the bombs that didn't release and it does release when he is sitting on the bomb so he rides it down waving his cowboy hat. I knew lots of people in SAC like Slim Pickens. They were obviously a different breed of person, but I always like to fall back on the clich#, “If the balloon went, they were the kind of guys you want on your side.” So, the morale was extremely high.

Q: What was your impression...obviously you were looking at the Soviet Union...of the Soviet Union and of the SAC people you were dealing with during this period, 1961-65?

TAYLOR: At that time, this was, of course, the pre-missile age and the threat as we perceived it was basically this huge armored capability they had in Western Europe towards a fairly weak NATO in conventional terms. We, in the Air Force and in SAC felt that we in fact represented the counterbalance to that. This was the old strategy of massive retaliation of “just cross that line and we are going to blast you with overwhelming

force.” But, it was an interesting time also because it was the onset of the beginnings of the rethinking of this kind of doctrine towards what eventually became General Maxwell Taylor's strategy of “Flexible Response.” When he was able to prevail in the administration, particularly with President Kennedy, the idea that nuclear holocaust or surrender should not be the two options that we faced. We should have something in between. So, after the early sixties we began to develop the capability to respond at less than a massive nuclear threshold. One could argue that that particular capability then had to be used and led us into Vietnam where the idea that you just ratchet up your commitment because the enemy can't stand that next level. Well, you tend to all of a sudden find yourself with half a million troops in Vietnam.

Q: What about during October, 1962, the Cuban missile crisis? What happened with you all?

TAYLOR: The crisis went on for about four weeks, if I remember, two weeks before Kennedy's major television statement and two weeks after that before the whole thing was pretty well brought under control. The public, of course, did not know about those first two weeks, which had been set off by U2 photographs of Cuba and the presence of Soviet missiles that could hit most of the United States, except for the far Northwest and West coast. We, in SAC, were running around-the-clock missions. Every plane that could be was airborne at all times up over what we called the HHCL, the H Hour Control Line, which goes across in effect the North Pole. That is where the planes patrol until they get a positive signal to launch. The crews and the equipment, itself, were really being strained. We were all working in effect 24 hours a day. The morale, again, was extremely high. These were the days of Curtis LeMay as SAC Commander, and if you didn't have high morale and high performance, you were gone. No crew ever bothered to offer an excuse for sub-par performance because it wouldn't do any good. LeMay was hard nosed but got performance.

SAC was operating at what we call Defcon2, Defense Condition Two. The only time in history that SAC has been at that level of readiness. Defcon1, of course, is launch. It was a pretty dicey affair. I remember that we, in my particular field, the intelligence field, was basically using information that had been processed through Washington and all of the agencies and fed up to operational units. Operational units don't really do much of their own analysis or evaluation. At that time a lot of our information, real time information, came from television. This was way before CNN, but at least we had the three networks covering this. I remember that I had just started a briefing of generals or colonels, or something like that, and we had the TVs going and one of the networks came on and said that they just had film from the Navy that one of the freighters that was approaching Cuba with missiles had been spotted dead in the water, and everybody concluded that Khrushchev had blinked. I remember the massive feeling of relief around the room, that Khrushchev had decided to stand down because we were prepared to stop, board and, if necessary, sink these freighters. So, that was a great relief. But then the whole thing went on for another two weeks, the negotiations. Most people read Bobby Kennedy's book, I think it was called “Thirteen Days,” which was a very good account of what was going on here in Washington. Eventually there was an unofficial trade-off of our missiles in Turkey for those in Cuba, and lots of other things. But, it finally came to an end after a couple of weeks. There were a lot of tired people.

Q: How about the planes?

TAYLOR: The planes held up pretty well, but, of course, every time you do a full scale operation like that you are going to have to lose some physically through crashes or accidents, etc. But we didn't lose any in our wing. The maintenance crews were doing yeoman duty.

I guess that was my major crisis.

Q: Well, it was the major crisis.

TAYLOR: That's right. The closest we have ever come to nuclear war, that is for sure.

Q: You left in 1965?

TAYLOR: Yes, in 1965 I finished the military. I had written my master's thesis in the Air Force, and had taken the Foreign Service exam while in the Air Force; I passed the oral segment about a year before I got out.

Q: Were you married?

TAYLOR: No.

Q: You took the oral while still in the Service?

TAYLOR: Yes, about a year ahead of time and was told that obviously the State Department could not ask the military to let people go, and so said that I needed to complete my military obligation, which I did.

Q: What was the oral exam like?

TAYLOR: There were three senior officers, two were political and management specialists, and one economic specialist. One seemed to be a Soviet specialist having served in Moscow, so he began asking me about Soviet affairs. That was my field so after about ten minutes he seemed to decide I knew that part so let's get on to something else. They asked me about American history, culture, current affairs in the world, current hot spots like the Middle East, Southeast Asia, which was just bubbling up. By that time we had about 15,000 advisers in Vietnam. They gave me a few theoretical situations. For example, if you were at a cocktail party and somebody starts grilling you in a hostile fashion about policy in Vietnam and why all these guys are getting killed, etc., what would you respond? So you were supposed to be able to articulate an official defense of American foreign policy. The third guy, the economist, was my real nemesis because

economics is not my field. He would ask me things like “explain the Federal Reserve System.” I would sputter around a little bit. At the end, when they finished, I just went out into the waiting room and within two minutes they came out and said that I had passed, but I should do my best to sort of buttress my knowledge about economics.

Q: I got exactly the same advice when I took my oral back in 1955. You were still in the Air Force then when you took the orals?

TAYLOR: Yes, still in the Air Force. They said just wait and they would see what they could do about putting me in a class.

Q: So, when did you come into the Foreign Service?

TAYLOR: I came in in the Spring of 1965. My particular class was sworn in on April 1 so we always joked about that...known as the April Fools class.

Q: Could you tell me a little about your class and the make up of it?

TAYLOR: There were about 30. We were all far different from what incoming classes and incoming FSOs are now. I was, at the age of 25, 26, among the oldest members. There was one guy who was about 29 and he was the old man. There were three or four straight out of college with BAs, several Peace Corps veterans, and 10-15, about half the class, had been military, mostly officers, although a couple of former enlisted men. A high percentage of advanced degrees. I don't recall any Ph.D.s, but several MAs and maybe one or two lawyers. Not more than five had had private work experience in banks, or something of that sort. Contrast that with classes coming in now which have members 50-55 years old and work experience of 20 or 30 years already. It was an entirely different kind of incoming class. There were three women.

Q: Where was your first assignment?

TAYLOR: I don't know what the procedure is now, but the director and administrators of the A-100 course (the boot camp of the Foreign Service, if you will) would come in on the last day and read down the names and read off your assignment. You had no inkling beforehand what it could possibly be. Some got Paris, some got Rome and some got Ouagadougou or Riyadh. My first assignment was Dacca but I needed to go through French language in order to get off language probation. There were a number of us....well, to get back to the class, it was interesting that there were very few people who had languages at the 3 level in those days because, as I said, we were young and there were few who had overseas experience, so languages were probably weaker than they are now for incoming officers. So, a number of us had to go through the regular French classes of four months to get off of language probation.

During the time of my studying French, one of the several Indo-Pak wars broke out and the people decided that Dacca wouldn't be, in those circumstances, an appropriate first assignment for a JOT and so they switched it to Tehran which was out of the particular area of conflict. I guess that made a lot of sense for there is no reason to assign people there if you are thinking about pulling people out of a war zone. So, I went to Tehran for two years.

Q: You were in Tehran from 1965-67?

TAYLOR: Yes, for two years which was a normal time for a first tour.

Q: What was your job?

TAYLOR: I was a rotational officer doing roughly six months in four different functions, sections of the embassy.

Q: What was the situation in Iran in this period?

TAYLOR: It was very stable, it was what some people call the good days of the Shah. He was very much in control, for better or worse. His regime was very much in control. His secret police were very effective. Khomeini had been exiled to Iraq, I believe in 1964, maybe 1963. There had been a major uprising from the bazaar people, a riot more than an uprising, in 1963 which had been put down with a lot of bloodshed. So, anybody even thinking of opposition was pretty much cowed. The foreign presence was... this was before the big oil crises and the explosion of oil money coming into Iran and the rest of the Gulf countries, so even though Iran was making a lot of money off of oil, it wasn't by any means to the same degree as later.

Q: So you didn't have this mass of influx of helicopter maintenance people and all that sort of thing?

TAYLOR: Not at all. The largest presence of Americans, other than the embassy, were with the NIOC, the National Iran Oil Company. We had no major military sales and support program. There was no huge American presence. I remember one of my jobs while in the admin section was to prepare part of the E&E, Emergency and Evacuation plan. At that time I remember we had roughly 5,000 American citizens in Iran to worry about as a possible maximum evacuation. By the time we actually had to go through that in 1979, I think there were upwards of 100,000, maybe even more. That gives you a feel for the increased American role there and in my opinion, in retrospect, probably one of the contributing factors to the whole crisis, that there were just too many of us doing too many things that were looked upon with disapproval by the mullahs and their supporters.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you were there?

TAYLOR: Armin Meyer was the ambassador for the entire two years. He had a stellar embassy. Nick Thacher was DCM and became Ambassador to Saudi Arabia after that. Stu Rockwell was also DCM while I was there and he became Ambassador to Morocco and Chief of Protocol. Martin Herz was the political counselor and became Ambassador

to Bulgaria. Ted Eliot was a reasonably young, 35 years old, econ officer and he later became Ambassador to Afghanistan when I was there. So that particular embassy at that time produced a lot of very senior and successful officers.

Q: Did you get involved in political reporting at all?

TAYLOR: Yes.

Q: Later, during the Kissinger period there was sort of a clamp down on what you could report. It seemed that you could only report nice things about the Shah. How did you find it during this period?

TAYLOR: It was exactly the same. There was very little contact with what you would call the opposition. The government, of course, did not want that and that view was expressed to the ambassador and the ambassador let that be known to the staff. As well as I recall, one or two embassy officers had contacts with a few acceptable mullahs, acceptable trade union leaders and acceptable bazaaris who were not only highly successful merchants in the bazaar but were successful local politicians in the Daley Chicago sense. But that was all, there was no widespread contact and there was no reporting critical of the regime. There were no doubts allowed to be expressed in terms of maybe this place is in fact vulnerable to something, maybe it is corrupt, maybe it is an oligarchy, great masses controlled by a very thin veneer of very wealthy people at the top. All power stemmed from the royal family.

There was one time after my tour in Tehran when I was the Iranian analyst in INR for the next three years, and Ted Eliot had become country director for Iranian affairs, I was trying to make the case one day that perhaps the Shah was not invulnerable. Maybe we should perhaps think about distancing American policy from too close identification with the Shah because when the Shah goes down he could well take US policy and US interests with him. So we could in fact portray ourselves somehow as independent of the Shah. There were human rights consideration even though there was no human rights policy, it hadn't

been drawn up yet. And there were a few other younger people who agreed with me. I will never forget Ted Eliot said, “Well, be that as it may, I think most of you are nothing but civil libertarians.” That was the extent of any dissent. Of course, there was no dissent channel in the State Department at that time.

Q: While you were in Iran was there concern...often it is the junior ranks in an embassy that are more idealistic...was that true in Iran at this time?

TAYLOR: That was the case. The people I am talking about were JOTs like myself or younger members of other agencies, including CIA and AID and people like that. There is also another quote that Kissinger, himself, made about the time of the fall of the Shah. He said, “Any policy that works for 25 years can't be all bad. So what were we arguing for, divorcing the Shah before there were any signs of major troubles and to what degree?”

Q: Were the young officers able to get out and around and see problems?

TAYLOR: Well, you could see the problems just by wandering through villages and seeing the extreme poverty in cities and at the same time drive by huge villas and see daily photos of the Shah and family doing things. These were the sixties, of course, and leftist revolutions were occurring left and right all around the world. So one could argue that this sort of reaction could be evoked by an absolute monarchy such as the Shah. As it turned out, of course, the reaction was from the right and yet the Shah's main concern was from the left. You all know the story in the fifties when Mossadegh was in control for a short time. He died, during my tour there, and got a 2 inch notice in the newspaper and that was it.

Q: Was there much contact other than a few tame mullahs with the religious side?

TAYLOR: As far as we knew at the time, that was much the extent of it. There was no information available to me, perhaps there was elsewhere, that Khomeini was building some kind of effective opposition to the Shah. There was a clandestine radio station up

in the Soviet Union broadcasting down to Iran things that were not only prepared by the left, but every once in a while something from Khomeini who eventually ended up in Paris with many of his advisers who eventually became well known after the 1979 revolution. But, no, it was the change of the circumstances as I mentioned before of this huge influx of foreign presence, foreign military assistance programs and the increasing corruption of the regime, probably those three factors, that became so exacerbated in terms of the mass of the population, that led to the creation of the massive opposition movements which exploded in late 1978 and 1979.

Q: Did you have any feel for how Armin Meyer operated?

TAYLOR: Well, it has been a long time and there were a lot of people between Armin Meyer and me, so I didn't have a whole lot to do with him. He was from the old school, he really was. He was tall, grey-haired fellow, very courtly, very gracious, well-mannered, soft spoken, but there was no doubt who was in charge of the embassy. I recall that every time he had an audience with the Shah he went through the business of putting on the formal morning coat, grey striped pants.

I do recall he explained to a couple of the JOTs, there were three of us at the time...he called us in one day and sat with us for about an hour and explained what they were trying to do, what the embassy mission, the whole US was trying to do. I recall that one of his techniques in dealing with the Shah—every time he had an audience—he had his own agenda with points he was going to make. He said that if his allotted hour was up, and if he hadn't gone through the agenda, he would leave a copy with the Shah and tell him that these were the points he wanted to make and although they didn't have time to get to them, he would leave them with him and would appreciate his giving thought to them. So, I thought that was kind of an interesting technique. Even though you had a very formal environment with the American Ambassador in these very formal clothes meeting in this great palace, he was still sort of saying, “Well, here king, this is what we didn't get to.” Sort of an informal touch to it.

After that he was named Ambassador to Japan and some fanatic at an airport in Japan during a visit by William Rogers, Secretary of State, broke through the security lines and stabbed Armin Meyer instead of Rogers. The corridor talk back in the State Department was that that was because Meyer looked more like a Secretary of State.

Anyway, that was the old Foreign Service.

Q: You came back and was in INR from when to when?

TAYLOR: From 1967-70.

Q: Was your work dealing with Iran?

TAYLOR: It was Iran and I had the portfolio of arms sales to the Middle East, tracking not ours but everybody else's.

Q: Did you feel you were getting pushed into an Iranian specialty?

TAYLOR: No, I didn't. I thought Iran was an interesting place, but I didn't want to be branded solely an Iranian specialist at that time. I wanted to see other parts of the world. I didn't feel under any sense of coercion at that time.

Q: Were there any significant developments from your point of view in Iran during this period?

TAYLOR: No, it was not a time of great change or turbulence or any major developments in Iran itself. This was the time when the British were withdrawing east of Suez. Everybody was talking about who was going to fill the vacuum in the Gulf. A lot of people felt the Shah had tremendous ambitions to do that and it sort of gave us a little pause as to why we would be backing the Shah versus our other friends on the other side of the Gulf who by

and large were pretty much afraid of the Shah, fearing the growing military capability that the Shah commanded.

Probably internally one of the major developments was his decision to make several major purchases of Soviet military equipment...conventional stuff, tanks, etc. A fairly large amount of stuff and it marked a departure from reliance on us and the British. That was a bone of contention for a number of years as to what was he trying to signal us, or was he signaling us anything.

Q: Were we responding during this period by saying we would sell him more stuff?

TAYLOR: Yes, we were to a fairly extensive degree, but not the way it became in the seventies. At that time one of our basic goals was to keep his appetite for sophisticated arms controlled as much as possible, satisfy it to some degree, but not completely because otherwise he would buy everything he wanted and couldn't operate it nor have the trained personnel to operate or maintain. He wanted submarines, surface ships, top of the line destroyer escorts, etc., to use in the Gulf. That was a red flag for the Saudis, of course, and smaller countries along the Gulf. So, we were doing two things. We were trying to decide what we could sell him and should sell him and then trying to explain away the rest of it as best we could.

Q: You were keeping track of arms sales in the area, what were the concerns about arms sales at that time? These were non-US arms sales weren't they?

TAYLOR: Yes. Well, you recall this was just after the 1967 Middle East war and people tend to forget that at that time the Israeli military was not US supplied, not US equipment. The 1967 war in the air was fought basically with French Mirages. So, as a result of that there was a great deal of interest in Washington regarding who was going to fill the gap given all the destruction of military equipment on the Arab side. The Israelis were being turned off by de Gaulle who just shut down further sales of spare parts and major equipment to the Israelis because he was very opposed to what the Israelis had achieved

in the 1967 war. And so, in effect, they turned to us and that was the beginning of this huge and intimate security relationship with the Israelis, up to this day.

But there was a lot of concern about what the Soviets might do, what any of our Western allies might do, because we were concerned about the balance of forces in the entire area. Whether massive resupply of the Egyptians would perhaps spark another war which we wanted to avoid. Being in INR we had no policy responsibility, we just tracked as best we could the inflow of arms and where they were going and how much.

Q: Where were you getting your information from?

TAYLOR: Mostly embassy and CIA reporting. A few nuggets would come out of publications like Janes and that sort of thing.

Q: What was your impression of CIA reporting?

TAYLOR: At that time, and I guess up until I retired, I was always very positive about what CIA produced in the way of raw intelligence. Sometimes the analysis of it, which was usually done back here, didn't always agree with what those of us in INR were thinking, but the raw information, itself, coming out of their stations overseas, was always I thought very useful. It was not crazy, off the wall stuff, at least in areas of my experience.

Q: Was there any concern that we may have been sort of over-arming, by "we" I mean the West and the East, including the Soviet Union, of putting too many lethal toys into the sandbox of the Middle East?

TAYLOR: Yes. Again a lot of us in State, and I had more senior officers agreeing to that between 1967-73 and then, of course, after 1973 it became a very difficult sell to argue that we should have more and more arms all the time. Before 1973 there was concern at State but we were pretty well steamrollered by the Pentagon and private arms sellers and the big airplane people.

Q: Did you get any feel for the political clout of the Israeli lobby from your vantage point?

TAYLOR: Oh, yes. Later in the eighties I served in Tel Aviv as a political military officer. There was no question of that after 1967, despite the huge victory that the Israelis scored. The Israelis have always claimed and argued that they have extreme external threats and therefore these have to be countered by extensive and very modern, state of the art military capabilities on their own part. That has been a driving force and the lobby, and it is not a homogeneous group, but in general what we would call the lobby has always been supportive of these requests and can bring pressure to bear quite quickly and quite effectively. Even up to this year we have seen the foreign aid budget cut drastically except the assistance to Israel and Egypt required by Camp David which has not been touched. Whereas a lot of countries have been zeroed out. So, it is an effective lobby.

Q: What was the role as you saw it of INR vis-a-vis the Desk in policy considerations, etc?

TAYLOR: It was a very nebulous one as far as I could see. We would write analyses of trends or shorter analyses of particular developments and clearly we would send copies of these down to the Desk or the Bureaus all over the place. I generally got the feeling that most of these were ignored, if they were read at all, because it seemed as if we, the INR directorship, at that time had very little impact on policy. The intelligence community produces an extraordinary amount of paper and reports. These are huge organizations that produce things daily, almost hourly. There is one publication that comes out two or three times during a work day. People on the Desk and front offices of various Bureaus don't have time to read all of that, pay attention to it or absorb it. They may wait until the end of the day and get a little briefing from their staff assistants or something like that. I frankly thought then, and later in a brief tour in INR, that it's essentially a very over staffed organization. It is the largest Bureau in the State Department in terms of people, and it does a lot of things which I think are probably superfluous.

Q: I was in it from 1960-62 and felt actually the same thing. It was a little like writing school essays or something like that.

TAYLOR: It was almost an unwritten rule, of course, that you never agreed with what CIA said. You always had to disagree to justify your paycheck, I guess. They are not stupid people at CIA. Sometimes we disagreed, but not always.

Q: You left INR in 1970. What happened then?

TAYLOR: I went over to Munich. My Personnel counselor said I needed some consular experience, so I went over to Munich, a nice place to be.

Q: From when to when?

TAYLOR: From 1970-73. I spent a year as the visa officer there and then two years as citizen and welfare officer dealing with Americans in trouble. This was kind of interesting for me in dealing with human beings, especially those who were really crazy.

Q: Do any cases come to mind?

TAYLOR: Well there were one or two showing up all the time. We used to have the authority, when they showed up destitute, to pay their fare back and pull their passports until they paid back their airfare. Well there were two cases who showed up in my office and I don't know how they got new passports even though they had not paid back the original fare.

There were a couple of people also who were really mentally off balance and it was my first experience in dealing with people of that sort. One of the things I learned is that they can sound very, very intelligent, articulate and logical until you pay attention to the words they are stringing together which don't make any sense whatsoever. On a couple of

occasions there was concern about physical violence and we had to call the marines and ask them to stand by the doors while we talked with these people.

But I got to see a lot of Bavaria, a big state. For this reason I was allowed to travel to a lot of jails around Bavaria. So, it was an interesting experience. It was the only consular job I ever had.

Q: Who was consul general while you were there?

TAYLOR: Ed Dougherty.

Q: Did you get involved in the political process at all?

TAYLOR: No. We had two officers there, one full time and one of the JOTs sort of circulated through the political operation. And that was enough even though Bavaria was a very important political state with a lot of independent-minded Bavarians, very active politically on the national scene. Probably two people doing political reporting and contact work were enough. And there was a lot of work I was doing on the consular side, but frankly, after two years of doing that it was time to move on to something more substantive. I don't regret having done it.

Q: Where did you go after that?

TAYLOR: I went down to the US Army Russian Institute in Garmisch-Partenkirchen. That has been operating since World War II. It used to be called Detachment R. State had one slot each year and several other agencies had slots. There were about 30 military in each class and about 5 civilians. So I was down there for one year, which is standard for State Department people.

Q: Had you had any Russian before?

TAYLOR: I studied it on my own in Munich. I decided I really wanted to push for an assignment to Moscow. I didn't have Russian language but I had a lot of academic background in Soviet affairs. By this time I was married, another reason I look back on Munich fondly because that is where I met my wife and married her. She is an American and is now a USIA officer working here. At any rate, we hired an old White Russian emigre who used to be part of the Tsar's personal guard when he was a very young man, probably 20 years old, as a personal tutor. We studied with Russian textbooks and he would work with us. I got to the point where I was able to follow and function down in Garmisch where all the instruction was in Russian. It was tough, not having had the FSI experience, but it was good enough to be worthwhile. And I enjoyed it, Garmisch was a nice enough place to study anything.

Q: How was the Soviet Union looked upon at that particular time?

TAYLOR: From 1973-74, you were in the beginnings of the detente era so people, Nixon and Kissinger, were moving towards a policy of down playing the threat side of what the Soviets were trying to do: their efforts to export Communism, and to subvert foreign governments in various third world countries. We were running behind Willy Brandt, of course, because he had launched his Ostpolitik several years before it occurred to us to enter the detente mode. He was extremely imaginative. I have great respect for him as Chancellor of West Germany. The Ostpolitik was designed to open relations with the East, both Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. To get away from the rigid, hard line, Cold War policies generally of the sixties.

Q: You were in the military school and taught by emigres. I understand these were emigres for the most part who probably belonged to the Communist Party and couldn't get visas to come to the United States so we went to them instead of them coming to us.

TAYLOR: Some of them probably were that, but most of the staff at the Garmisch institute were as anti-communist as you could possibly imagine. There were a number who had

been POWs, captured during World War II, and managed somehow not to go back and their anti-Soviet feelings were extremely sensitive. The entire curriculum and outlook of the Russian Institute in Garmisch was extremely hardline, anti-Soviet, anti-Moscow. There wasn't anyone who was willing to listen to the concept of “maybe we could work something out, we could deal with this regime somehow and try to work towards a common goal of some sort.” That was not acceptable. By and large it was a generational thing. I think the youngest member of the staff had to be at least 60 years old. They represented a generation that was exposed in the Soviet Union pre-World War II. I don't think anybody came out after World War II. So, it was a very narrow, substantive time and curriculum there, not terribly rewarding by insights, but my major objective there was the language and to be able to develop an ear for it and try to learn to speak it as much as possible.

Q: So, in 1974 you left.

TAYLOR: In 1974 I went to Moscow.

Q: You were there from when to when?

TAYLOR: From 1974-76, two years.

Q: What was the situation vis-a-vis the Soviet Union at that time?

TAYLOR: I suppose one could argue that that was the height of detente. There were efforts at the highest level to improve relations, to work together to try to solve various not only bilateral problems but to reduce tensions in other areas of the world where we were in effect competing, such as Africa, the Middle East and to some extent Asia. On the bilateral sense there were several, four or five, Kissinger visits. He would come over and would stay out in Lenin Hills, which is where the VIP delegations were put up and negotiations held on various arms agreements. This wasn't my field, but as far as I recall these were the beginnings of the major bilateral arms reduction treaties and agreements. It was a lot of alphabet soup at that time and subsequently I have forgotten a lot of that. But, it was

interesting to see how a Secretary's delegation would come over and behave, especially with somebody like Kissinger. Of course, we all know his opinion of his role in the world.

We could travel in most areas of the Soviet Union. They had closed areas, of course. The major method of governmental control keeping us tethered to Moscow and Leningrad when we got too close was logistical. They made it so difficult to make flight and hotel reservations. They made it so difficult, even at the height of detente, in ways that made it so unpleasant that you would often give up trying to do much traveling.

One little program we had down there was price comparison of agricultural goods. There were great questions and uncertainly at the time about the Soviet grain harvest, which was either adequate or disastrous.. A lot of people felt we should let them starve to death and then communism would be less dangerous. So, one way of trying to evaluate the truth about this particular harvest, this was 1975 I believe, was to have everybody who traveled anywhere take along a check sheet consisting of various questions. What kind of produce you saw, what kind of meat, what kind of poultry and at what price? How long were the lines, not was there a line? We had a couple of Agriculture attach#s, and I guess they were responsible for collating all of this information and trying to reach a conclusion from it. One argument was that if there was a lot of meat in the market that meant it was a bad harvest because they were slaughtering all of their livestock because they didn't have any grain to feed them. This was an interesting non-State Department effort, which I felt was worthwhile. Apparently it did contribute to some degree to our conclusion that they did have a disastrous harvest that year and we were able to construct a grain deal which meant a huge amount of money for Kansas and places like that.

So, that was a little side light of the kind of efforts the embassy did in terms of collecting information.

Q: As you traveled around, did you ever feel the heavy hand of the KGB giving you a hard time, or sweet young ladies appearing at opportune times?

TAYLOR: You always traveled in pairs and were briefed to avoid that particular latter point you brought up. As far as the official surveillance, it was definitely there and it seemed to depend upon the concern of the local security officials involved. There was virtually no surveillance in Moscow outside of your housing complex because there were just too many foreigners and it was too big a city and they couldn't track everybody all of the time. And, much was the same in Leningrad where the post was smaller, but still they just sort of let it go. But, if you traveled to a smaller town, into Siberia, the Caucasus or some place like that, you could definitely count on the surveillance guys being very, very evident. They often apparently decided they didn't care whether you knew they were there or not. They were just going to be right next to you and behind you and see what you did. If you didn't like it, that's tough, get on the next plane and leave, which is probably the purpose anyway. They didn't particularly welcome your visit and were probably just as happy to see you go as soon as possible. If a little bit of heavy handed surveillance contributed to that departure, so much the better.

So, I would say it depended upon the local official; in the smaller cities they probably were more nervous to have embassy people running around.

Q: Given all this, were you able to develop any friendly contacts?

TAYLOR: Probably fewer than you could count on one hand; say three people. We knew that they had to have official sanction to see us as frequently as we saw them and do the kinds of things together in Moscow that we did. But, despite the fact that we knew and they probably knew that we knew it, they continued to socialize with us. There was one couple in particular. They were both professionals, professors in different fields. One was a very senior economist in the government and she was in the arts. We went various places with them, to the theater, the symphony and things of that sort. But, you are right, it was virtually impossible to do that on a large scale. If you make a couple of friends, that would be about it.

And in those days, in the time of detente, one of our major goals was to try to convince the Soviet government to lay off, if you will, their own citizens who might be inclined to have contact with Westerners. That was part of the agenda we had during detente, that you have to loosen up internally and one of the concrete ways of doing that was to make it less threatening for your own citizens to have exposure and friendships with Westerners. How much we succeeded, I don't know, but some people felt that they had good friends. We did have a few, and some others in the embassy felt that they had developed reasonably close relationships with some Soviets.

Q: What was your job?

TAYLOR: The first year I was what they called the publications procurement officer, which is an overt collection effort. The person who has that job buys publications, books, encyclopedias, maps, anything that is in print from as many bookstores in Moscow as you possibly can, but also from out in the provinces in major cities where there might be different publications from those found in Moscow. It had been going on for about 15-20 years before I got there and went on for years afterwards. It is funded by 15 or 20 government agencies back here. The largest being CIA and State, of course. So, it was a collection, a logistical operation, a management kind of job. My budget was about $250,000 a year, so it required some budgeting effort. This meant a lot of books because they were very cheap. It was fun because I got out and was able to move around a little more and was exposed to unofficial Soviets a lot, people working in bookstores, the Soviet working man or woman.

Q: I have talked to people who have done this and they say in the big city it was a little hard to do it because they were a little more sophisticated, but when you got out in the boondocks the clerks were pushing books because they got more of a quota and were kind of interested. Did you find that?

TAYLOR: Yes, that is true. You would show up in some remote city and go to a couple of bookstores and people couldn't understand why you would want 20 copies of this stupid thing. You are right, they would be willing to sell you as many copies of anything. You could buy the whole bookstore if you wanted to and had the money to do it. But, in Moscow I ran into a number of people who were very leery of making everything available. They would sort of give me the impression that they were conducting their own censorship program as to what they should sell to foreigners.

Q: What was your impression of the book publications in the Soviet Union? How wide ranging they were and quality of them?

TAYLOR: There was a huge number of scientific and technical titles being printed at that time. I wasn't very surprised at that given the nature of the society. I guess there were a lot of people who depended upon technical skills to retain some standard of living and others who were hoping to develop these same skills in the technical field to get a better standard of living. But there were large bookstores that were doing nothing but technical and scientific books and they were doing big business. I don't recall any emphasis in any bookstore on what you would call fiction or current events or other fields that are so popular here. Even there they would have huge selections of scientific and technical departments. They were very limited in terms of writers. The writers who were well-known to be acceptable to the regime were there, but they weren't especially popular or widely read. So, I guess I would say it was much more limited than just about anywhere else in the West, with the emphasis on the hard sciences and technical fields.

Q: What did you do your second year?

TAYLOR: The second year I had the Middle East and Africa portfolio in the political section.

Q: What does this mean?

TAYLOR: The political section was a very large one. I think we had nine officers, about four in the internal side who focused on internal developments in the Soviet Union, analyzed them and reported back, and about five of us on what we called the external side, Soviet policy toward certain geographic areas of the world. One colleague had Western Europe, for instance, somebody else would have the bilateral arms negotiations. I had Middle East and Africa, and another fellow had Asia and another one Latin America. This meant in effect we followed Soviet policy toward these regions, Soviet reaction to developments in those regions. In Africa, for instance, Angola was beginning to become a big bone of contention in the bilateral relationship. That was the first time anybody could remember where an African issue really took a lot of time in a political section. And, of course, the Middle East; it was just after the 1973 war and the Soviet rearming and support for Syria. But not much moved on the bilateral front in the Middle East.

Q: Could you go to the Foreign Ministry and talk to the equivalencies of the Desk officer and say what is going on here?

TAYLOR: Yes, there was a particular officer with whom I dealt on the Middle East and there was a more senior official with whom the political counselor dealt. Most of the time the two of us would go over to the senior guy and I could on my own go talk with the junior guy, an appointment could generally be set up in a couple of days. Those were the dealings on the Middle East side. As I recall it was rather amusing when I first called their equivalent of the African Bureau and asked with whom do I speak on this particular issue or something like that. It took them days to figure out what to do because nobody had ever asked about Africa before because it had never been of interest to both countries. So that is the way that worked.

We dealt a lot with other embassies. There was an interesting practice on the Middle East side. There were eight or nine embassies with officers focusing on that or it was part of their portfolio. This was Germany, Britain, France, Canada, Japan, the Western allies. We would have a practice of about every three or four weeks get together for a long,

long lunch at one of our apartments and discuss what had happened in terms of each particular officer's experience over the last few weeks. Basically we would try to time these to fall after something major like a Kissinger visit, or a visit by the British Prime Minister or the French Foreign Minister, or something like that so we could hang it together. Then, whoever was the lead, if you will, would give a briefing to his colleagues saying what you could without being out of school and revealing too much. Basically you knew you could brief these people and the information would go back to their governments.

Q: You were briefing the KGB at the same time.

TAYLOR: Probably. Yes. Our ambassador, the British, French and German ambassadors, had a meeting every Friday at rotating embassies and they would meet for about an hour. So they would do much the same thing. Ambassador Stoessel would call down and ask for some briefing points on what he could tell the other three ambassadors regarding our particular area. So, we would prepare him for these things. So, at all levels we were working very closely with our allies' embassies. It was a good way to learn things because obviously we were among the best informed, but not totally informed. Obviously our allies had contacts and insights that we didn't. So, it was a useful, cooperative effort. As I say, even at the height of detente one was still living in a controlled environment and information was still difficult to obtain and was very valuable and prized if you had something that other people wanted.

So that was basically what all of us in the political section were doing, especially the external guys. The internal guys had it a little harder because they didn't have a lot of other government officials to call on. You couldn't call on the foreign minister and say, “Well, is there anything interesting going on?” It just didn't work that way.

But, this was the days when there were incidents involving Soviet artists. It has been twenty years, but there were incidents where they were trying to hold art exhibits of some kind of contemporary art in a public park or somewhere and the bulldozers would come

and smash it all and arrest some people and there would be some people lying in front of the bulldozers in civil disobedience, and things like that. So the internal guys had a lot of contact in the artist community, the dissent community and among the Jewish community. Jewish immigration was a major issue at the time. That played in different ways, both here domestically, and domestically within the Soviet Union and then bilaterally in the concept of human rights. So, the Jewish community there was a major target for our internal guys for gathering information.

Q: While you were in the political section, what was the evaluation of Brezhnev?

TAYLOR: This was mid-Brezhnev. He died four or five years later. Basically it was that he was really probably 98 percent fossilized intellectually and 75 percent physically maybe. The levers of power were in his hands or those of his advisers, but Brezhnev was not anyone who would advocate or focus on changes or anything innovative. The man was very limited, if not totally without any concept of reform and change and modifying policies of various kinds.

Q: How did you all view the various nationalities and their problems in the Soviet Union at this time?

TAYLOR: It was not an issue that was front burner. The general view was that Moscow and the Soviet institutions of power had everything in absolute control internally. There was no question of nationalities breaking away or staging any kind of uprising. Nonetheless, there was a feeling that they had taken as many steps as they were willing to to provide autonomy, or recognition that the nationalities did in fact represent non-Russians, separate kinds of societies, values and cultures, but they were not willing to allow that to develop into a political movement of any kind. The lid was on and the lid was going to stay on. There was absolutely no doubt in anybody's mind about that. If anybody ever tells you that they were predicting what was going to happen in 1989, they

are blowing smoke of some kind because there was never any discussion or questioning that the Soviet Union would exist forever.

Q: Looking at it from the outside I always thought it was a lousy system economically and all that, but as far as socialist control the communist system can really grab people and keep it from going somewhere.

TAYLOR: That is exactly right. I never read or heard anyone try to predict what was going to happen until it actually happened. I don't know if anybody has actually tried to claim that they did predict it.

Q: How did we view the two areas you were looking at? What were the Soviets after in Africa, particularly in Angola? Although, I imagine Ethiopia was also a place of interest.

TAYLOR: Yes, this was the time of competition over Ethiopia and Somalia in the Horn of Africa. There was concern that the Soviets were expanding. Not only was there the general view that the Soviet government was in control internally, but the general view was also held that they were quite willing and able to export their ideology and their political influence. They were trying to do it in the Middle East and they were really doing it in Angola and the Horn. We had considered Africa, in particular, an arena for both American influence, and a Western role. We were concerned with the Soviet willingness to expend political resources and also military and economic resources in Africa. That was going into a new area and raising the competition to a new level, which we considered threatening. Threatening in and of itself, not necessarily to vital American interests, although military control over the Horn was a broader question of access to the Gulf and South Asia, etc.

Q: Did Cuba enter into the equation in Angola at all?

TAYLOR: Yes, Cuba provided the manpower, the cannon fodder for the joint Cuba-Soviet effort in Angola. It was quite clear that the Soviets were funding this effort and that the Cuban army had always been equipped with Soviet equipment and quite capable of

using it in Angola. They were quite effective, being much better organized than any of the Angolan parties. So, militarily they were quite a factor.

Q: I take it what you were doing almost the entire time you did this was reporting and there wasn't much representation, we don't like this, we wish you wouldn't do this, or would you please do this, with the Soviets?

TAYLOR: There wasn't much of that, no. My particular involvement would be a demarche with the ambassador or the political counselor, and that happened half a dozen times in my experience.

Q: You would draw up a statement and go over it and he would deliver it?

TAYLOR: Yes. They would note it and generally not respond, but we didn't expect them to. These were the standard diplomatic approaches that one expects.

Q: Were you also watching other parts of Africa to see if the Soviets were fishing in troubled waters, etc.?

TAYLOR: As best we could. There were concerns in other parts of East Africa like Mozambique. They were obviously focusing in on former Portuguese colonies that were being left in chaos. The Soviets threw their surrogates into these former colonies in an attempt to use them as means of entry into the political arena in East Africa. Mozambique was sensitive because of its location close to South Africa. There was little doubt that if the South Africans felt a threat emanating from Mozambique, the South Africans would react and we didn't really want to be on the side of supporting any South African military activities into neighboring countries.

Q: To try to get to the mind set, here the Soviets are playing around in the Horn of Africa, in Angola and all, were you and your colleagues sitting back and saying, “Big deal. This is

not going to go anywhere," or was there the feeling that this might start something that in a way we would end up with a series of hostile countries to American interests in Africa?

TAYLOR: I can't speak, obviously, for the highest levels of American policy making, but I got the sense that people both in the Soviet field as well as people working on the African side in our government, felt considerable concern that despite the various high level visits that had taken place by Nixon, Kissinger, Brezhnev and the atmosphere of detente and the publicity about cooperation, they were embarking on a real, genuine expansionist policy into an area which had not been part of their focus before. Whether people were terrified? No, I don't think they were, but I think there was genuine alarm that this was sort of counter to the understanding we thought we had with the Soviets because they were so willing and able to diverge from that and begin mucking around in areas which were essentially very unstable. The old phrase "correlation of forces" was in vogue those days. That being the doctrine that the tide of history was on the Soviets' side, the side of communism, and that it couldn't be stopped by Western reaction and efforts and that the Soviet Union had an obligation to support these revolutionary, what were called national liberation movements. They had done so in Cuba and would do so in the other areas of emerging independent countries. My sense at the time was that there was real alarm in Washington, that this was something that we had to address, even though there were no vital US interests in Mozambique and Angola, for example. On the Horn of Africa there were other concerns.

So, I guess in a nutshell, the alarm over Soviet willingness and eagerness in many ways to export ideology was coming to the fore. And, of course, this became even more heightened in the late seventies after the Shah fell, Afghanistan fell and Brzezinski's calling that area the "arc of crisis."

Q: We were drawing long red arrows towards the Persian Gulf, right through easy passage through Afghanistan.

TAYLOR: Yes. Again it was absolutely impossible for anyone to foresee that it would be only ten years from the fall of the Shah in 1979 to the fall of communism in 1989.

Q: It looked like it was going the other way.

TAYLOR: Exactly. And I detected, maybe people who worked in Africa and the Middle East felt that the universe rotates around whatever your particular job is, but I tend to think that maybe even the people higher up in the geographical Bureaus were concerned about what was going on.

Q: What about in the Middle East? You had the 1973 war which was just over. This was before Camp David which effectively took Egypt out of the equation and completely really changed the whole balance. From that time on it was a whole different set of calculations. But at this point, Egypt had shown up well in the war, although it lost it. We were very nervous about oil. The Soviets were resupplying the Egyptians and certainly moving into Syria and Iraq was practically their vassal state. From your perspective, what were the Soviets trying to do?

TAYLOR: They were trying to build a large enough relationship with Syria which was probably their closest ally, and favorite government with which to work in the region, to offset American influence on the Israeli side. Again, as you point out, this was well before Camp David. But at that time our policy was to try to get negotiations in a peace conference somehow started among the various parties, but doing it gradually, step by step. That was the clich# in our policy, don't do anything in a general type of peace conference which would achieve nothing and just overwhelm the Israelis diplomatically. We wanted to do everything possible to arrange a step by step negotiation among the various parties involved. The Israelis with the Egyptians, the Jordanians, the confrontation states, but including Syria. The Soviets did everything possible to support the Syrians in rejecting that approach.

So, I guess by and large at this particular time between the 1973 war and the beginning of the Camp David process with Sadat's visit to Jerusalem in response to Begin's invitation there was very little movement on the political or diplomatic side. I would say it was not a time of spinning wheels because there was a lot of effort and time spent by a lot of bureaucrats, me and thousands of others, working toward whatever we could achieve in terms of developing these contacts that would eventually lead to something, we hoped. Again it was one of those human things that you couldn't predict. You couldn't predict the fact that all of a sudden Begin would say, “Well, okay, if you want peace, come to Jerusalem and we will discuss it.” And Sadat saying, “Okay, why not?” Who could have said that that was going to be the way it would develop?

My own feeling, and it is a minority view but I am not alone in holding it, is that the 1973 war from Sadat's point of view was a last attempt on the military side to prevail. He indicated to his own military, who were and are a political force in Egypt, that we had our best shot. We surprised them, we got a lot of force across the canal. We did this and this and you guys did your best. But, we are not going to do it again. We cannot take these losses, withstand the cost in financial terms of another war and constant conflict. You have had your chance. I gave it to you. I gave you everything we possibly could in terms of building up your ability to fight this war and we lost anyway. So, no more military solutions. I am going to pursue the diplomatic and political side. And so he did. He came home with a huge prize in the Camp David Accords. He got all of the territory back, billions of dollars immediately and every year since. It cost him his life, of course, but in the larger scheme of things Camp David was far better than winning the war.

Q: In Moscow were you able to talk to the Egyptian and Syrian embassy people?

TAYLOR: Yes. I mentioned the practice of dealing with my NATO allies on a regular basis. There were two guys at the Egyptian embassy who were as top notch diplomats as I have ever run into and they were always readily accessible and wanting to talk and meet and discuss things. Never met a Syrian. Did meet an Iraqi once, but that didn't last very long.

The Jordanians were good and very friendly. But, basically the contacts I had on the Arab side were more with the Egyptians than anybody else.

There was an Israeli trade office, or something like that, but we didn't have much to do with them. That kind of liaison all took place in Washington or in Israel. There was just not much to do with them.

Q: A question I like to ask at each post. Walter Stoessel was your ambassador. How did he operate?

TAYLOR: He was much in the mold of Armin Meyer. He was old line Foreign Service. Very formal, very gracious guy. He had his agenda working with other ambassadors and when necessary at the top levels at the Foreign Ministry and other ministries. He would spend every weekend out at the dacha. The ambassador had a dacha about 25 miles outside of town. He and his wife would go out there every weekend, so he was not tied to the office the way a lot of us were. But, he was very structured in his day. There were set staff meetings and some of them would be with the entire political section, sometimes with just two or three depending upon the issue. He tended to delegate the actual running of the mission to the DCM.

Q: Who was DCM at that time?

TAYLOR: Jack Matlock.

Q: Who later became ambassador.

TAYLOR: That's right. The first few months I was there it was Spike Dubs, who became Ambassador to Afghanistan. Then Matlock took over and ten years later was ambassador himself.

Q: Is there anything else that you think we should cover in Moscow?

TAYLOR: Oh, there are the normal funny stories.

Q: Well, tell me a funny story.

TAYLOR: One time a colleague and I on one of these book buying missions were out in Smolensk. We took the train out there and it was in the dead of winter with snow three feet high. We went to dinner at one of the approved restaurants, probably the only one in town that was open at that time and our KGB surveillance which had been with us all day long were at the table next to us. After dinner we were heading back to the hotel and needed to ride a bus back. We came out of the restaurant into a freezing cold blizzard and were about maybe 30 or 40 yards ahead of our surveillance. We saw the bus we needed pull up at the bus stop but then start to pull away very slowly. Totally inadvertently, not trying to have anybody lose his job with the KGB or anything like that, the two of us started running towards the bus and barely got to it before the door closed. Of course, our surveillance came bounding up and were pounding on the door, but the bus driver didn't stop. So we ditched our tail accidentally. I don't think those guys were too happy because they were not the surveillance the next day. They probably in effect were disciplined somehow. But they could have been very ticked off at us. Because the standard ground rules were don't be cute, we looked at each other on the bus and said, “God, what have we done? It was fun, but what have we done?”

Q: You left Moscow and where did you go?

TAYLOR: Kabul.

Q: This is December 13, 1995. Jim you came back and took language training first?

TAYLOR: We left Moscow in the summer of 1976 and came back here for about five months TDY language training in Dari, which is the Afghan dialect of Persian or Farsi that is spoken in Iran. The languages are very similar. The only differences are a few

linguistic nouns and the accent. It is very much like American English and British English in differences.

Q: Here you are an old Moscow hand, what attracted you towards Afghanistan?

TAYLOR: Well, Personnel. We were, for a long time, a tandem couple, and didn't have that much flexibility in terms of what you can try to push for. So, Kabul was one post that came up with both USIA personnel and State personnel appropriate assignments for my wife and me. It wasn't as if we knew anything about Afghanistan or were attracted to it, but that was a post that came open, so we took it.

Q: I am thinking a decade later, but when you were in Moscow, had Afghanistan been even a blip on your radar at the time? Were people talking about Afghanistan?

TAYLOR: No. There were no events up until that time that would have attracted anybody's attention in Afghanistan from any point of view. It was just fortuitous that we happened to be there when all of the events that everyone knows occurred and the Soviets became extremely involved and eventually militarily invaded the country. And also it was just by accident that Spike Dubs, who was the DCM in Moscow, himself an old Soviet hand and Eastern European expert, was named Ambassador to Afghanistan after the first communist coup in 1978. Some people believed that was one of the reasons he was murdered, because he was too much an expert on Soviet affairs. I don't believe that is the case, but some people believe that theory.

Q: First place, talking about your Dari training. Sometimes taking these courses you learn quite a bit about the country just from your teachers. Did you get any feel about Afghanistan from the course you were taking?

TAYLOR: Yes, we did. Our language instructor was an Afghan who had been in the States five or six years. He came over as a student and married an American girl and stayed in the United States, got his green card and by now I am sure is an American citizen. But,

at the time he was recently arrived from Afghanistan so he had a lot of stories to tell us in English when we would break and get away from the Dari. He spoke about life there, what one could expect, how one behaves, etc. So we learned quite a bit from him. The area studies, however, associated with Dari and Afghanistan was South Asia and they lumped Afghanistan in with India and Pakistan. Of course, India and Pakistan tended to dominate the intellectual and scholarly discussions and presentations from area professors and senior officers. But a couple of times we got presentations specifically oriented toward Afghanistan. One of the more colorful Afghan experts of the time was a fellow by the name of Louis Depree, who has since died. At that time he was probably the foremost scholar on Afghanistan and he was in Afghanistan at the time we were there and then came back to the States, and I think he was associated with Duke or North Carolina or one of the universities in North Carolina. He had written probably the basic textbook on Afghanistan, a 800 page tome that one had to wade through. He was a very colorful guy. I think every other word was a profanity of some kind. So, at cocktail parties and things of that sort he could raise a certain amount of interest.

Q: What was your job going to be and what was your wife's job going to be?

TAYLOR: I was going to be a political officer. We had three officers in the political section in Afghanistan. My wife was going to be the assistant cultural officer serving as director of the American Center in Kabul. So, given those two areas of specialty we met a lot of different people in different walks of life. We were able to sort of cross breed, if you will, the various contacts and areas of interest.

Q: When you arrived there, we are talking about early 1977, what was the situation in Afghanistan?

TAYLOR: Afghanistan had had a sort of palace coup in 1973. The king had been overthrown by his brother-in-law and cousin, a member of the family, if you will. The king had been exiled to Rome and the new ruler of Afghanistan in effect maintained many of

the same policies, foreign policies as well as domestic. There had been very little change. Initially in 1973 there had been a growing, increased influence from the left. There was a communist party in Afghanistan although it didn't call itself that. But Muhammad Daud, the ruler who had overthrown his brother-in-law, the king, gradually reduced the influence of the left and by the time we got there Afghanistan was being ruled in a very traditional fashion with Kabul as a center of power but using provincial and tribal leaders as sort of the conduit of directives and policies coming out of the capital.

Q: Let's talk about the embassy at the time and what were our perceptions at the time.

TAYLOR: The embassy on the State side was relatively small, with two econ officers, three political officers and the usual two or three admin specialist. So that wasn”t a terribly big mission. USIA had five or six officers so it was fairly big for the country. We had a very large AID and Peace Corps. Afghanistan was among the five poorest countries in the world. There wasn't a lot of money in AID but the Helmand River project had been in progress since the early fifties so that was an ongoing major AID project for the irrigation and control of the water of the Helmand River. It was one of AID's worldwide show places and really quite successful. But they were also, in those days, building schools, roads, health centers and infrastructure. They have gotten away completely from that now, of course. But at that time, that was their main operation. So we had AID people all over the country in small villages. The AID kind of person was entirely different in those days too. They were specialists in things like construction and irrigation, sewage systems and health. So the AID person was different from the more business oriented individual that you have in many of the AID operations these days.

Afghanistan was a sleeper post, but in the sense that there was a wonderful climate, it was about 7000 feet, Kabul we are talking about, had all four seasons of the year and was a very, very interesting country with a lot of history and varied cultures and you could travel quite easily. The ambassador was Ted Eliot who had been an economic officer in Tehran when I was there 10 years earlier. He encouraged us to get out of Kabul as much

as possible. He recognized that Afghanistan wasn't the center of Washington's attention, but he tried to get everybody active and participating in the country and our efforts in Afghanistan in a bilateral sense.

We, in effect had the first year of our tour, from early 1977 to early 1978 under the old regime, the traditional rule of a government by the elite families called Pushtuns in Afghanistan and Pathans in Pakistan. These were the tribes that lived along the Pakistani border that gave the British so much trouble in three wars in the 19th and early 20th centuries. This Muhammad Zai clan had ruled Afghanistan for years and Muhammad Daud was a member of that clan. The view of the embassy and mission was that that would be the case, probably forever. There would be modifications one way or the other in policy, but there was virtually no anticipation of any great upheaval.

My particular responsibility was internal political affairs, assessment and analysis of internal political affairs in Afghanistan. And, so for that first year I was able to travel a great deal to all parts of the country.

Q: You say internal affairs and you say Muhammad Daud was a tribal leader, I would think for a political officer in a way to understand what was happening it would be much more difficult than in the normal sense where you read the party papers and talked to the party people, etc., but in the traditional society where the ruler is in effect sending off messages and getting together with various tribal chiefs, this is not a matter of public knowledge. It is done over coffee or by indirection. How do you tell who is doing what to whom?

TAYLOR: Well, that is a good point. It was very difficult because a lot of decisions would presumably be discussed in private. When it was made it was not necessarily announced publicly. Daud, the ruler, would call in these various subrulers out in the provinces and inform them of what the policy would be or what the decision had been and when it had been taken and what they were supposed to do. Sometimes, the way it normally worked,

they would accept that and go about their business of implementing it up in the north or the south, etc.

Our ability to determine what was going on was limited a lot to looking at personnel changes, shifts in the cabinet, shifts in the sub-cabinet, rumors making the rounds in Kabul among our Afghan contacts. That kind of thing. We didn't have a whole lot of confidence that we knew what was going on although outwardly there were few signs of any kind of challenge from either direction, the extreme right or extreme left. We had virtually no contacts with the extreme left. That had been squashed by Daud soon after his coup in 1973 and accepted by the U.S. ambassadors. This ability of the host government to dictate U.S. contacts with potential opponents was very similar to what had happened in Iran under the Shah. The efforts of our CIA colleagues in Kabul were focused on Soviet affairs. Everybody knows that in the old days the way you made a career in the CIA was to focus on Soviet activities and recruit Soviet agents. It wasn't a focus on what was going on in Afghanistan because that had no interest for the professional intelligence operation, it was what the Soviets were doing.

Q: Could you talk about the Soviet presence and our view of what they were up to and what were American interests in Afghanistan?

TAYLOR: The Soviet activity in Afghanistan was perceived at that time as an effort to maintain the predominant position of influence that behooves a super power in a small country on its borders. This was perceived by the Soviets as a natural thing, that Moscow deserved primary external influence over Afghanistan because of its location and relative size of the two countries. The means by which they did that were basically economic in those days rather than political. It was trade and economic aid. There was a great deal of activity especially in the north where there were large natural gas resources which were Afghanistan's major export at the time. Signs of any kind of subversive political efforts were not there. They simply exerted their influence by being the 800 pound gorilla right next door and Afghanistan had to sort of accept the facts of geography that that was

the way it would be. Throughout history the Afghans have done their upmost to avoid dependence on any external power and this was basically directed at both the Russians over the centuries and the British in terms of British India and what eventually became Pakistan. But, within those constraints, the Afghans tried to be as independent as possible and were using us and other Western countries, the Germans had a small operation as counterweights. But basically your major external powers were the Soviet Union, India and Pakistan.

Q: How about Iran at that time?

TAYLOR: Iran under the Shah was again a natural power in the region but the Iranians played a reasonably aloof role. Afghanistan to the Shah was simply a country cousin. That is the way the Persians, Iranians considered the Afghans, as sort of mountain hillbillies, as best you could describe the attitude of the Iranians toward the Afghans. Q: There wasn't meddling along the border as far as trying to bring tribal leaders into the Iranian orbit?

TAYLOR: No, not until after the Shah's fall did that begin to happen. All of this happened in 1979, the Shah fell, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, and after those events, the Iranians under the new regime became very active in Afghanistan based primarily on their anti-communist, pro-Islam point of view. That was the reason that they wanted to overcome the Soviet rule in Afghanistan.

Q: Particularly though your wife's activities, I would have thought you came into contact with the intellectual society, those who were educated abroad. Did you get any feel for the newly emerging educated class?

TAYLOR: Well, we did to some extent. The American Center was really quite effective and an active place. The teaching of English was extremely popular. There were hundreds every day in the center learning English, using the library and, of course, mingling among themselves and bringing stories of what it was like at the universities. The universities under Daud were really very sensitive places. We weren't allowed to go out and just

wander around universities and talk to people, to make contacts with professors, etc. So, if the students came to us that was one way you could pick up rumors and trends of attitudes among the university crowd and the young post-university crowd who were eager to learn English. Therefore, the Center was also able to provide openings to the intellectual professors and some of the professional people among the ministries who would come to activities at the Center. There would be cultural presentations, speakers coming out under USIA auspices who would go to Iran or India or Pakistan and then just stop by this mountainous backwater place in Afghanistan just to see it because it was a pretty exotic place that was off the beaten track. So, in that way we were able to establish contact with some of educated, not only American educated, but Western European educated, Afghan emerging middle class, if you will, although the population was still by far a rural village population and with very few technocrats and educated specialists of that kind.

Q: Was there a sort of bazaari class?

TAYLOR: Yes. It was not nearly as potentially influential as the same kinds of people in Iran. Every city, of course, had a bazaar in it and the merchants and money changers were always local leaders in the economic sense and from that economic position would be able to exercise local political influence and leadership as well. But, we, in the embassy had little, if any, contact with the bazaari crowd. It was simply not something they would want or welcome and there weren't any means to work with them. Our econ guys who would be the ones to naturally deal with them focused mainly on the commercial side of those people who were dealing with the banks and the simple commercial operations, and not necessarily the bazaaris but the Westerners, the guy who represented Mercedes or Air France, or somebody like that.

Q: How about with the military? At that point what was the Afghan military like and how did we deal with it?

TAYLOR: We had, I think there were four attach#s, Army and Air Force attach#s, and a few enlisted men supporting them, so it was about the right size, I suppose. The Afghan military since the fifties had been trained and equipped by the Soviets. Hundreds and thousands of Afghan officers had been taken to the Soviet Union for training in the use of this equipment and as it turned out, as we learned later, had also been indoctrinated. We had suspected there had been efforts in indoctrination, but we were unaware that the indoctrination had taken hold enough to the extent that it would lead to the coup of 1978 conducted by a bunch of youngish military officers who had been trained and subsequently at the same time indoctrinated by the Soviet Union. We were able to deal basically with the top leadership in the military and had virtually no contact with the younger officers, majors, captains, lieutenant colonels, who actually conducted the coup of 1978 and subsequently rose to positions of command under the new regime. So, we were dealing with the generals in Kabul and some of the major commands who were picked by Daud and would, of course, not have been prone to express negative views of the way things were going and were not likely to mount coups against the fellow who had in fact hand picked them for those particular positions. It is almost a classic example of how things operate in the third world.

Q: It is so difficult because in any country I am sure military attach#s, including foreign military attach#s in the United States, don't really get much contact with majors and captains and in some armies the generals don't really know what is going on with their majors and captains. Anyway, what was our impression of Daud during this period? What were you getting from the ambassador?

TAYLOR: The ambassador had the view that entire year that I was there that Daud was in control, knew what he was doing, was being very cautious in implementing any kind of reform programs. He had come in in 1973 on a reasonably ambitious reform program, land reform, education reform, reform for increased rights for women, etc. A lot of the programs that were necessary to bring Afghanistan into the 19th century you could say. But, he had

moved very, very slowly and the ambassador was of the opinion that Daud had everything under control, that there was no evidence than anybody was going to challenge him and that there was no reason not to support what he was doing through our programs, AID and the Peace Corps and a small military program amounting to training of about 20 people a year. There were no arms sales programs. So, in effect the ambassador was the one talking to Daud and he felt that Daud had things well in hand. So, that was our marching order. Again I point to Iran. I think my two experiences in Tehran and Afghanistan have led me to believe that sometimes ambassadors get so close to the ruler of whatever country they are serving in that they lose sight of potential problems, the potential demise of that ruler through his own mistakes or own shortsightedness or lack of foresightedness or whatever, and that they can misread situations completely. This is not done maliciously or on purpose, it is just the fact that they are the ones talking to the ruler and the ruler seems to have everything under control and if he tells him he has everything under control, who am I as the American Ambassador to disagree with him.

Q: Well, you reach the point where you could take the other side and say, "Ah, yes, it is quiet but....," always waiting for something to happen and in effect undercutting your effectiveness with the ruler who may be around for 20 more years. If the ruler doesn't understand what is happening in his country, the American Ambassador is not necessarily going to be any better informed. It depends.

TAYLOR: Well, I recall there was an incident professionally in the embassy when probably two or three months before Daud was overthrown I drafted a paper about Daud's succession. He was in his late sixties and nobody knew about his health, but we thought it might be worthwhile putting a think piece out. I did the best I could to get some information about the status of the radical left. We knew pretty much the status of the right and the military and the intellectuals at the universities and the normal sources of challenges in the third world, but the left we had very little information on. But I wrote a paper that raised the possibility of a leftist attempt to take over based not on intelligence or information but mostly on what the situation was. The fact that here was this country that was dreadfully

poor, dreadfully ignorant, and the elite ruling just about everything, all the economic and political aspects, it was just ripe for a big leftist takeover. These kinds of things happened in so many places in the sixties and seventies, that it was just ripe for the same kind of takeover. Then I also discussed the mullahs and the military and basically most people felt that if Daud were going to be overthrown it would probably be by a group of traditional military generals who felt that his reform programs were not going too slowly but too fast. But that paper never got out of the embassy. The ambassador said there wasn't any evidence of a leftist challenge which I admitted. We didn't have contacts with the left so how could we produce evidence. So, just discussing the left was an impossible effort and that paper never went anywhere.

Subsequent to the coup there was an interesting exercise the outcome of which I never heard. Somebody in Washington contacted the embassy in about June of 1978 and wanted to know why the embassy had never discussed the possibilities of a leftist takeover. The ambassador, to his credit, scrounged up everything that the station had been reporting, which was not very much, and this particular draft that I had done, and said he was going to send it all back to Washington. I presume he did and what happened to it I have no idea.

Q: Was there any evidence, while you were doing internal affairs, of discontent in the villages...unhappiness of the tribal chieftains or the mullahs off doing things they didn't like, etc.?

TAYLOR: No. Well, there were people obviously in poverty in a stricken country like that and unhappy with their lifestyle, but nothing that would indicate that they were ready for a popular uprising. I would like to stress that the coup against Daud in April, 1978 was not a popular uprising, it was a strictly military operation by a group of indoctrinated and dedicated leftists, young military officers, who were accompanied and supported by the Afghan leftist communist party, which had an infrastructure but it was not by any means a popular uprising from the villages among the poor. The Afghan communist party had been

around for a long time and its basic leadership had been known for 30 years by both the Afghan government and security forces and us and just anybody else who paid attention to Afghanistan. The cadre, however, were mostly university students, university drop outs, people who had been exposed to a system where they were outcasts. They tried at the university, couldn't make it and became very, very hostile to the existing situation in Afghanistan, the political environment, and the fact that they had no future there. But, they were ambitious enough and young enough that they then gravitated toward the communist party and established contacts with the younger military officers who actually physically carried out the coup d'etat.

Q: I would like to have a personal account of what happens in a coup. What you were doing, what your wife did, what the embassy was doing, how you saw it and how it operates and the story of it.

TAYLOR: The spark that set it all off occurred the night before. The coup was on April 27, 1978. A couple of days before, one of the leaders of the communist party was gunned down in a part of Kabul where many of these people, sort of middle to upper middle class lived. He was gunned down by parties unknown. We subsequently learned that his senior colleagues in the communist party believed that it had been done by the regime and were very wary of what would be the next step by the regime. The next night, the night before the coup, Daud made a fatal mistake when he ordered the arrest of all of the leadership of the left for reasons that never became clear because he and all of his senior advisers didn't survive the coup itself. So, we don't know exactly why he sent out orders to arrest all of these people, but he did. In a general sweep that night, he got most of them but didn't get all of them. The ones who remained at large were able to establish contacts with the military members of the party who had this operation all planned. They were simply waiting for any kind of instructions to come down from the political leadership in the party. That occurred the next morning and it was carried out by two armored divisions that were stationed about ten miles east of Kabul. These were the best trained and best equipped

armored divisions in the Afghan military. Presumably they were there for the government to protect itself against this kind of event.

So, Daud's palace guard was completely out gunned. Most of the palace guard remained loyal but they couldn't withstand a couple of armored divisions. So, militarily it wasn't much of a contest.

I recall I was in the embassy and it was a day off, we had a Thursday-Friday weekend in Afghanistan in those days. I was working on this paper I was talking about and got a call from my secretary, actually, who had been trying to take a picnic east of town down toward the Kabul gorge, to the very scenic area nearby. She said that there was some kind of unusual military activity going on out by the two armored division bases. I said okay and got one of the embassy vans and driver and headed out to see what I could see. I ran into roadblocks by regular army troops, heavily armed. They were not your normal traffic police or even security police who normally conducted these kind of things. These were regular army troops in combat gear and they seemed very, very nervous. I talked my way through a couple of them. They were only about a half a mile apart. As I got closer and closer to the base the roadblocks became more and more frequent and it seemed to me the troops became more and more nervous and the guns pointed at us were locked and loaded and I could see battle-ready tanks moving around. They were battened down and the covers were off the main guns so they had the capability of firing immediately. So, at about the third or fourth roadblock, I heard an exchange between one of the troops, not one of the officers, and I believe it was an Air Force officer who was in his sort of day off dress uniform. This Air Force officer was trying to find out what was going on and this soldier, GI, pointed his machine gun at the Air Force officer and told him to go home and stay there. At that point I decided it was time for me to get back. I didn't especially want to get shot or arrested. As it turned out one of our colonel attach#s who was also out in the streets trying to find out what was going on was detained by troops for about an hour that day. So, I then had to talk my way back through the same roadblocks I had gone through 30 minutes before and eventually passed the last one and, got back to the embassy. There was no

one there, the ambassador was over at his residence, so I hustled over to his residence and there were the political counselor, my immediate boss, and one other officer.

Q: Who was the political counselor?

TAYLOR: A fellow by the name of Bruce Flatin. I think they were at the pool. I came up to the ambassador and that group and explained what had happened. They were working on a MemCon of a conversation between Daud and Eliot that had taken place the previous day, I think that was what they were trying to iron out to get sent off that day. And, just as I was telling them what I had seen, we heard machine gun fire from somewhere in the city, seemingly from the palace area, and then a couple of heavier rounds of ammunition which were tank guns obviously. You can tell the difference, at least I can now, between a tank round and an artillery round. We decided that something was going on.

At that point we got a call from the marine guard at the embassy saying that ten or fifteen tanks had just passed in front of the embassy on their way to the palace. The main road went from the area of the military base, past the embassy and then down towards the palace. So, obviously we decided that something was going on and that we ought to find out what it was. I got in my own personal car and drove down toward the palace to see what I could see and passed a number of troops who were deployed, these were palace guards, in what we called Juis (Jooeys) which were open sewers on the sides of the streets, although no longer used for that purpose, but they were about three feet deep or so and a couple of feet wide. The troops were deployed in those with their machine guns and individual weapons. Then I got down towards the palace and there were tanks running around in different directions in seemingly a fairly chaotic situation. At the same time it was quite busy with pedestrians. You had commercial activity going on at exactly the same time. People were going in and out of hotels and fellows were pulling two wheeled carts.

So I went down to the major traffic circle and dodged a couple of tanks, there wasn't any major gun fire going on at that time, but there certainly was a lot of deploying of troops and

equipment. When it became obvious that things were not terribly safe right there, I went back to the embassy and by that time virtually everybody had gathered at the embassy to compare stories and what we had seen to determine what was going on.

Q: Had anybody called or telegraphed Washington at that point to say that something was going on?

TAYLOR: I don't think so, but I am not sure. I don't know when our first Situation Report (sitrep) went out, probably it would have taken an hour or so and this was about that time. I think probably we were beginning to gear up towards planning SitReps. Obviously we needed to try to put together what was going on. So the ambassador authorized a couple of us from the embassy to go out to see if we could put together all of the fragments of the developing events. One of the econ officers and I went out in an embassy van and we had an embassy driver with us. We went down past the palace and saw a lot of tanks around deployed with their guns pointing out and some palace guard troops at the same time in and among these regular armored units. We subsequently learned that the armored division had used deception, claiming that they had come to the palace to protect Daud rather than to kill him. So that is why we initially saw this intermingling of these troops because the palace guard had been duped into thinking that these guys were coming to save the regime.

Then we were going down past the Ministry of Interior located right by the ambassador's residential compound which was a pretty substantial compound with traditional big walls around it. Just as we were slowly approaching the main gate I looked back and two or three tanks had pulled up in front of the Ministry of Interior which in a coup is one of the normal primary targets. When they swung their main guns around and fired on the building, at that range it was a fairly noisy operation. I decided that it was time to be a little more prudent so my colleague and I swung into the ambassador's compound for refuge. We were able to establish telephone communication with the Embassy; the coup leaders hadn't gone after the PTT building, which the Soviets did during their invasion,

being their first target. But the coup didn't do it that way. So, we were able to establish contact with the embassy and I told people there what we had seen and where we were. By that time there was a lot of fighting around the Interior building, so we just stayed put. The compound wasn't hit by anything as far as we could tell.

Q: Was there anything on the radio or from your Afghan drivers saying who was doing what to whom?

TAYLOR: No, in these initial hours there wasn't any information of that kind. In round terms this started about 12 noon. As I recall an announcement came over the radio about 5 in the afternoon that in effect Daud had been overthrown and killed in the fighting at the palace and there was a new government in control and that everybody should stay calm and stay at home and not resist.

So at the compound there were the two of us and Pat Eliot, the ambassador's wife, and a number of her staff and a couple of his guards at the front gate and our driver. So there were eight or ten people in the house, all pretty much taking cover in the middle of the house which was probably the safest place.

During the afternoon there was a lull and about 3:00 the Air Force arrived and they began bombing and strafing the palace. A standard joke was that even though an Afghan pilot might be aiming at the palace he could hit anything in town; they were not the best pilots or most accurate in the world. So, the chances of random casualties among the Americans, I guess were fairly high and neither the embassy nor the compound were that far from the palace which was the main target. So, that's where we were. The Air Force played probably the key role in destroying any opposition that was approaching Kabul and the armored units consolidated control. Fighting in the palace resulted in the death of Daud and any number of his senior colleagues and a lot of the palace guards.

Q: Was the feeling that Daud and his senior people were killed in the fighting or were they killed later on?

TAYLOR: We got reports second hand but these were supposedly from people who had actually witnessed what went on that Daud and others were holed up in one of his offices within the palace, and when the troops burst through the door they all opened fire on each other and he went down in a blaze of gun fire. Given the Afghan attitude and behavior pattern, I don't doubt that at all. I can't imagine that he would have surrendered to what he would consider a group of dissident troops.

If I could digress one second, the next day the regime opened the palace to the public and invited anybody who was interested to come through to see where the historic events had occurred and what had happened. To see how the regime had lived so opulently at the expense of the masses. So Eliot authorized me to do that. He thought obviously it would be unseemly for him to go. He said given my particular responsibilities I should be the one to go through the palace to see what it was like. I, of course, had never been inside. Eliot may have been there at some time but usually business was conducted elsewhere. So not many people had been through there. So I joined a long stream of thousands of citizens and went through the palace. One of the things that struck my mind was the room where the final moments had taken place which was really shot up with windows blown out and holes in the wall. They had taken the carpets covered with blood and had laid them on the grass outside wanting everybody to see the last remnants of the former regime. That happened for one day and then I guess decided it was a questionable public relations effort and closed it off and nobody was able to go through.

Q: What was your impression of the palace? Was it opulent?

TAYLOR: No, it was by no means as opulent as what I had seen in Tehran, for instance, and not by any means lavish in that sense and certainly not by Western European

standards of how monarchs used to live. It was a large compound, had a lot of buildings on it, traditional old buildings of interesting architecture, but by no means lavish.

Q: I take it then the situation, if they were able to do this, was over rather quickly?

TAYLOR: Yes. There was some fighting that went on after dark, and after dark was when everybody got very nervous about the security because the Air Force again came out and if the pilots were risky in the daytime, at night they would be worse. You just didn't know what would happen and these concerns were legitimized because about midnight the largest explosion of the whole operation occurred and nobody knew what it was. It just shook the compound that we were in and when I was able to get through to the embassy they said it had shaken their building and nobody knew exactly what it was. The next day we were able to find out by looking at this very, very large hole in what used to be the middle of an intersection near the Chinese embassy which was reasonably close to the palace that presumably had been the target, unless the pilot had just simply dropped it some place as a warning to anybody. But there was this huge crater in the middle of an intersection in front of the Chinese embassy and that was the kind of thing we were extremely worried about, an accident by some random bombing and shootings, etc. Nobody got very much sleep, of course, and the embassy was pretty crowded, there must have been 30 or 40 people at the embassy. My wife was there and other officials and communicators. By that time SitReps were pretty much going out on a regular basis. The embassy had not been hit, but colleagues who were there said at one point a helicopter gun ship was firing rockets at the palace and apparently made a turn and fired one of the rockets when it was turning and that one came right over no more than 20 feet above the embassy and slammed into a house behind the embassy and killed a family of four or five people there. So it was a dicey night, but by dawn it was pretty clear that everything was over.

Q: You have a situation when obviously you want to find out who is doing what to whom. Also as you mentioned Afghanistan is not a centralized country, you have these tribal

rulers and what happens in Kabul might not have much effect elsewhere. You have a lot of AID people out there. What was the original analysis, how did you make contact with the powers that were in control and finding out what was happening outside?

TAYLOR: We had the original announcement and knew by then who was behind all of this. It was the communist party, the Peoples Democratic Party of Afghanistan. Those were the people who were behind it and claiming to have political power and that was their regime that had been established through this military operation. It took a long time to sort out how we were going to deal with this regime and how to go about establishing relations between AID and the government and the Peace Corps and the government.

In the initial days it was essentially just listening to what was going on and we dealt strictly with the Foreign Ministry. Of course, you had a tremendous turnover there. You had a new Foreign Minister and new deputies and our normal contact, the director of the American Division was gone and I don't know what ever happened to him. He was never seen in Afghanistan. Whether he ever got out, I don't know. The Foreign Minister had been killed at the palace during the fighting. So, the whole senior leadership at the Ministry was gone and replaced by, quite frankly, people who were less impressive in terms of their knowledge of how to deal with foreign governments and our concerns. But basically in those initial days, we had a number of responsibilities, only one of which was to try to find out what the political situation was. There was a great deal of concern about security within the American community and what the situation was in the countryside. Eliot did authorize several teams to do road reconnaissance missions down to the Qandahar and up through the pass to the north and even trying to get down towards Peshawar to Jalalabad, down towards the east, just to see if there was any kind of evidence of resistance by other military units elsewhere in the country, whether there was any kind of reaction elsewhere. These teams came back within a day of two with reports that there was virtually no evidence that anything had happened.

Q: It really is surprising. From what you described you would have thought that this would have unleashed essentially tribal unrest in support or against.

TAYLOR: Initially, I guess, it was a matter of surprise, shock, disbelief. There was nothing. I didn't go on one of these. I stayed in Kabul continuing what I was doing there. They came back and said it was as if nothing had happened. They ran into very few roadblocks once they got outside the capital and said it was very bizarre. But, we filed these reports and the analysis seemed to be that the coup had been a palace coup and was not a popular uprising but had been a very effective coup d'etat and the new regime in Kabul was in place and the old one had been gunned down. Whether that would last or not we were not quite sure, but that was what we could see.

Q: Well, this wasn't quite at the height of the Cold War. This was the Carter administration and we were trying to do more business with the Soviets, etc., but did this send up both in Washington and in our embassy, all sorts of communist, Soviet meddling in affairs? Did we realize this was a turning point?

TAYLOR: No, not to the extent that the Soviet invasion 18 months later caused. This particular coup, to the best of my knowledge, didn't set off a lot of alarm bells in Washington simply because Afghanistan is such an isolated, exotic place that it wasn't a front burner issue for American interests. Therefore, I don't think it had a great impact in Washington or at our embassy in Moscow in terms of, “My gosh, the Soviets have grabbed another country through their surrogates in the Afghan military.”

The best information we could put together weeks afterwards was that the Soviet government, and particularly the Soviet embassy in Kabul, itself, were surprised as much as anybody else by these events. It occurred very quickly from the gunning down of the first guy to the subsequent decision to arrest all of the rest of the communist leadership to starting the coup in motion. The Soviet mission was just as surprised as anybody else. And, I think that is true. The ambassador felt in those first few days that that was being

naive, “obviously the Soviets” were behind the coup and instrumental in carrying it out. But, then he subsequently tempered that because there wasn't any evidence really that they were in the decision making process or in effect consulted by the coup makers. He was right in the broadest sense that the Soviets were behind the coup because they had trained and indoctrinated all of these guys and they were behind it because it was Soviet equipment that was used. But, in the immediate sense, I think the Soviets were not behind it and had not planned it that way. I think they were content with simply being the most influential power in a country that was right on their border. They didn't need all of this violence and takeover and radicalism.

Q: Well, this is, of course, the general conception of what we had learned to live with and accept as detente. You have spheres of influence and you don't mess around. Afghanistan turned to be crucial in the breakup of the Soviet Union. What you are talking about is the first step that led essentially to the Soviet disaster in a way might have been precipitated by Daud making his move against this leftist leadership and they felt if they were going to something they had better do it now or they might not have another chance.

TAYLOR: That's right.

Q: Well, what about talking to the drivers, the local staff, your contacts, your wife's contacts were they running around saying, “Who are these guys?”

TAYLOR: No, essentially most of the people you just described knew who these people were. They were quite aware that this group of leftists...as I said many of them had been prominent 20 years earlier in political affairs, but had been sort of under house arrest for a long, long time...but everybody who would talk to us, like the drivers and cooks and people like that, were critical, hostile and hated them in effect because they were godless communists and everybody knew they were godless communists. Most of the Afghans, of course, were very devout Muslims, so there was a natural antipathy towards this new regime which in the broader sense became the resistance movement in the countryside

that lasted ten years. As you say, the first step was the coup in 1978, followed by the gradual disintegration of control over the countryside and then some of the major cities. Eventually the Soviets, believing the Afghan regime was losing control, made the decision to invade, throw out this regime and put in a puppet regime and keep an army there to crush the resistance in the countryside. We decided to bloody the Soviets' nose as much as possible in Afghanistan so we started supplying clandestine military support and training for the next ten years. This bubbled along until they had to pull out in 1989 and by that time you had had so many Soviet casualties and disillusionment that it began to play a role in the whole undermining and breakup of the Soviet Union.

Q: Was there a problem with recognition of the new regime?

TAYLOR: I guess the short answer is no, there wasn't a problem with recognition. We continued to deal with the regime. We had our AID and Peace Corps operations going. We had USIA operations going. We had normal Foreign Ministry contacts. So, it wasn't a question of recognition. We took the position that the issue of recognition did not arise, we just continued dealing with whatever government was in Kabul.

Jumping ahead to 1979, when the Soviets came in, I felt it was appropriate to raise the question of recognition because this was a regime that was thrown out by a Soviet military operation and a puppet government was installed by them. I argued with the charg# that therefore it was not a legitimate regime and therefore not deserving our recognition. He agreed with that point of view and sent a message back saying that we felt we should withdraw our recognition and close down. The Department did not accept that argumentation, therefore maintained an embassy for the next ten years as we all know until we did close in 1989 after the Soviets left. But I think the circumstances were different in 1989 than they were in 1978 so we took the position to continue as we were before the coup. And that is what happened. Eliot left in the summer of 1978 and was replaced by Spike Dubs who came in and presented his credentials to the new president Taraki, so that conveyed the concept of continued formal recognition.

Q: How did we look upon this new government? Was it one that was going out and taking retribution, was it heavy handed? How did it take the controls?

TAYLOR: It was pretty brutal. It did in fact execute a number of people who were potential leaders of a possible counter coup. It imprisoned a lot of people who were from the former elites. There was in infamous prison outside of Kabul that was overwhelmed with prisoners and former military officers and security officers and just about anybody who had a position of influence or minor influence in the former regime. Torture was quite well known and that was carried out in a building right across from the embassy. There was a security installation there that we learned was the center of the torture operation. The people involved were really a pretty unsavory group of people, both the civilians and the military, although a couple of the military who had carried out the coup seemed to be okay, not quite as sleazy as the civilian side of the operation. So, it became a difficult time because the people with whom you had to deal were not the kinds of professionals you would expect to deal with. This was especially true in the non-foreign ministries. The Foreign Ministry crowd who came in were reasonably sophisticated and tolerant of viewpoints that were not as doctrinaire as their own, but the guys who came into the information ministry, ministry of commerce and any of those ministries with which you normally have contact and business, didn't know what they were doing. There were stories of people making official calls with business to take care of and the guys carried pistols or had them right on their desks because you never know when you might need them. It became sort of a hall mark of cabinet meetings that somebody would get shot. There were actually gun fights at cabinet meetings. The president, Taraki, was gunned down at one of the outbreaks, and eventually we called them OK Corral cabinet meetings. These people were extremely violence-orientated.

Q: This sounds very Afghan rather than a communist environment. They might have come from the left but this was certainly a home grown product.

TAYLOR: Yes, the political solution in those days was through the barrel of a gun and it led to the down fall of any number of leaders. As I say Taraki, the president, who was the oldest member of the leadership and who tried to present himself as sort of a grandfather figure, was killed at a cabinet meeting later in 1978.

Ambassador Spike Dubs arrived about 3 months after the coup in 1978. His approach, and I mention it in the chapter I wrote in the Joe Sullivan book, was: “Yeah these guys are pretty bad, but they are in control. Many are unsavory, they are anti-West, they don't like us and will do everything possible to make life miserable for AID, Peace Corps, USIA and everybody. But, still they are the government here and we have to work with them. If we don't work with them we might as well go home. So, let's get on with the job the best we can. Do what we can to work with these guys and try to persuade them that perhaps we have a point of view and a world outlook that is preferable to the one that they have been operating with and come to believe is the wave of the future.”

So, that was his approach and that is what we did for roughly the last six months of 1978.

Q: What were we seeing the Soviets doing at that point?

TAYLOR: The Soviets were responding in a sense to this passionate embrace by the new regime. I am not sure that was welcomed as much as just a realization that they had this new regime down in Kabul doing everything possible to strengthen the ties between themselves and Moscow. So there were new trade agreements signed, new commercial agreements signed, new missions that came in, new projects welcomed. Taraki went to Moscow and signed a new friendship treaty with the Soviet Union. So there were all kinds of new ties between the two. I always thought and argued, some didn't agree, that all of the initiative for this came from the Afghan side, not necessarily from Moscow, but Moscow did respond because it was a new ideological regime and you remember in those days the great buzz word was called “correlation of forces,” and the Soviets and the intellectual leadership under Brezhnev believed quite fervently that the correlation of forces was on

their side and the wave of Marxism was rising and every regime was eventually going to become a Marxist regime.

Q: There really was concern as to whether this really was the wave of the future. As things were basically getting ready to fall apart, there was a feeling that this was the new wave. This was appealing to the discontent, etc. When you were there was anybody looking at China?

TAYLOR: Yes, that is a good issue to raise. China had a very large embassy and served very good Chinese food a couple of times when they had us over. It was an unusual situation. Nobody knew very much what China was trying to do. They had a few aid operations going, but this very large mission didn't seem ever to be doing much. We couldn't figure out why they were there. They did have this common border way up in the Himalayas but nobody could even get there and no one knew where the border was probably. But, those were the days of Chinese/Soviet competition and they were trying to offset the Soviets by giving them a little competition in Afghanistan. But, they didn't play a major role in these events. Even though they were ideological brethren, the Afghans looked to Moscow, they didn't look to Beijing as a source of direction, advice or resources. So they were sort of an odd man out in much of this. There wasn't a great deal of concern that they were going to play a major role. It was sort of one of those things not that we ignored them because we overlooked them, we just ignored them...

Q: ...because at this time we were going through a rather pleasant stage of relations with China. How did Spike deal with the new regime? What was he bringing back from his meetings, and what were some of the issues we were having to deal with?

TAYLOR: Basically we were trying to establish an acceptable environment for carrying out the operations we had been carrying out before this new group came in. In other words, trying to overcome or avoid the regime creating obstacles to successful operations, specifically on the AID, USIA and Peace Corps, the instrumental agencies of the US

government, not people like us. A lot of it was deliberate, but a lot of it was complete incompetence. These guys, as I said, didn't know what to do, didn't know their job, so when somebody from one of the operational agencies would bring up an issue and say that we want to do this because and this is how we are going to do it with these resources and will bring in a team to do it, the new guys would say no, you can't do that, adding, “How do you expect us to approve a program like that? Get out of here or I will shoot you,” or something like that.

So, these were the kinds of problems. It was deliberate obstacle making, if you will, and at the same time incompetence. They were just not experienced enough to know how you go about approving a commercial contract, an AID operation, or letting some Peace Corps people, who were obviously “spies from CIA” as everybody knows, out into these villages. It was not a very fulfilling time for anybody because the kinds of people you were dealing with were difficult and unpleasant and the programs you were trying to continue, to carry on or create, were not going anywhere. So, a lot of stuff just came to a grinding halt.

Q: What about the American Center?

TAYLOR: The American Center came under criticism publicly a few times. The regime placed some thugs at the entrance, you know uniformed guards, for security reasons, but, of course, it was designed to intimidate people who would normally go there. Attendance at the language center pretty well stopped for a few days, but then when people could see that they could go back and we were going to continue operating, within a reasonable period of time, the operation came back up to the same level it was before. The thugs were able to intimidate some, but not very many. So that continued and some of the programming continued.

Just after Spike Dubs' murder, for instance, the little theater group did a performance of Oklahoma for morale purposes and to just keep people occupied. That was a resounding success. I think we gave five performances and at each one they were hanging off the

rafters, if you will, it was such a popular thing. This is one example of what we were doing and the response of the Afghan population.

So that was a very active operation and a lot of people came to learn the language and the other programs there simply to try to find out what the United States was going to do, and expressing their opinions in sort of whispered terms that they really hated this regime and could we get a visa sometimes, etc. They didn't all ask for visas but some did. And they would pass on information of rumors, there were a lot of rumors on every possible issue circulating, as you could imagine in an environment like that. Everybody lived by rumor because nobody believed the newspapers and radio any longer and they no longer had any of the traditional sources of information as they used to have under the old regime.

In the countryside, the resistance was beginning to mount. In the really remote regions the regime had very little control and there was beginning to be information about some kind of resistance in some of the larger towns, not in the major cities, but in the larger towns. I don't know exactly when our support of the resistance actually started, but it was about this time.

Q: Well, this is moving ahead so...

TAYLOR: No, this was in 1978.

Q: Oh, still in 1978.

TAYLOR: I don't know when our actual arming of the resistance began, but the resistance was getting arms from some place then.

Q: Did you have the sense that our CIA operation was beginning to shift to take a look at what was happening within the country as opposed to the Soviet Union?

TAYLOR: Yes, they began devoting some resources to domestic events. I don't know either when the political policy decision was made back here that we were going to use Afghanistan as a means to bloody the Soviets.

Q: Well, the Soviets, of course, were not that committed at this point.

TAYLOR: That's right, they weren't.

Q: There was no Soviet military so it was still a local home ground operation.

TAYLOR: Yes, although there were lots of advisers, but they were at that time I think genuine advisers. There weren't any organized Soviet military units until the actual invasion.

Q: And also we had a President and administration which was not trying to overplay the Soviet card. If this had happened very early in the Reagan Administration, it might have caused quite a different reaction.

TAYLOR: Yes, I think that is valid. You also have to remember that they were in that period really focusing on the Camp David process.

Q: Camp David being a peace between Egypt and Israel. Were you getting much in the way of media attention there?

TAYLOR: No, the coup was covered by Time and Newsweek and other periodicals but once the coup was over and this new regime was in, there was very little media attention. The contrast between the coup of 1978 and the Soviet invasion in 1979, in terms of American media, was really stark because after the invasion in December, 1979, within two days when that airport opened and they decided to give visas to come in, we were inundated by 30 or 40 correspondents. It got to the point where we had to hold a daily briefing in the afternoon. That didn't happen in 1978.

Q: Today is February 1, 1996 and we are starting in 1978 the immediate aftermath of the coup. What happened then?

TAYLOR: Well, in the initial days after the coup of 1978, our major task, responsibility and objective were to try to assess what the new regime wanted to do, who the people were involved in the new regime, what their policies might be and things of that sort. It was a complete change from the regime that had been in power before. We had a little bit of a file on some of these guys because there had been a legitimate leftist movement in Afghanistan throughout the post World War II two decades, until it had been suppressed and outlawed by the former king, who, himself, was overthrown in 1973. So there was a little bit of bio information, a little bit of knowledge of who some of the top leadership was. It turned out that the guy who actually became the number one on paper at least, had been an IV grantee to the United States (exchange program) way back in his early days and had had a brief tenure working for the USIS operation in Kabul, but he went on to academic work after that and then got involved in leftist politics. He, himself, was eventually gunned down in one of these cabinet meetings that I mentioned earlier. I think three times there was violence, bloodshed and death at cabinet meetings. So, when we talk about nasty politics in this country, they play for keeps over there.

Q: How did you operate in this post coup period?

TAYLOR: It was difficult to get anything firm. Rumors, of course in an atmosphere like that, were wild and rife and were just impossible to pin down. But basically rumors were a lot of what we had to deal with and were our basic source of information. It was useless to go to the Foreign Ministry and try to find out what was going on. All of our so-called contacts had been swept aside and if they had survived, they were no longer in office. So, we began in effect from scratch making calls on various ministries and trying to develop some kind of relationship with the new people. But, the quality of the new people was dreadful. Many of them, if not most, were completely uneducated, maybe out of high school, mostly not. They were the kind of people who would be drawn to a dissident, outlawed movement and

in a very poor and backward country to begin with they were even more on the outside more than most.

Q: Was there any tribal basis to this group?

TAYLOR: No, it was a mix of the Pathans and some of the other minority groups as well. There wasn't any specific ethnic group that would make that identification.

Q: Do we have an ambassador at that time?

TAYLOR: Yes.

Q: Who was he?

TAYLOR: Ted Eliot at the time.

Q: Well, did you all sit down and figure out, okay we have a coup, it is a leftist group, what are our interests and what really is at stake here outside of trying to keep informed?

TAYLOR: We still had an AID mission, a USIS operation and a Peace Corps operation, so basically the policy decision that was made by Ambassador Eliot and Washington was to continue as much as possible business as usual with the new guys, if we could. Afghanistan at that time had very little strategic interest to the United States, if any at all. Our primary policy objective was to help the country develop as much as possible and our two major tools for doing that were AID and the Peace Corps and on a more intellectual level, the USIS operation in the capital. So, therefore, there wasn't a whole lot of interest in Washington in the domino theory that we have lost Afghanistan and others will follow. It wasn't that at all. It was basically humanitarian development and economic development.

How we were to be able to continue, was our basic question mark in the embassy. Could we develop a rapport with this new regime whereby they will accept an active AID operation in the countryside and accept Peace Corps volunteers out in the villages and

places like that, because it didn't take long before the hostility and the anti-Americanism and the pro-Soviet leanings of the new regime became very clear even in the public press, which of course had always been a controlled press, but not like it became in 1978. So, that was basically it. We would have staff meetings in the embassy and Eliot would say, well, how are things going in the last few days in terms of developing any kind of meaningful contacts with some of these ministries. We had a large, very active AID mission and I thought they were very talented people. They were doing their utmost to develop the right contacts with the right people to get permission to continue various programs they had going. It became very difficult because of two factors, the anti-Americanism and the shear incompetence on the part of the new regime in staffing right on down the line. They just didn't have the right kind of people. The technicians, for instance, working in the Ministry of Public Works, didn't know anything about repairing bridges or highways, or anything, the kinds of things that AID was doing in those days. The AID mission now is entirely different, but in those days they were doing infrastructure.

So, it became more and more difficult, but we kept trying. My particular responsibility was to report all of the political leanings and whatever tea leaves I could read in terms of policy and orientation of the new regime. It didn't take much skill because it became so anti-American that anybody could see it.

Q: Were you getting any reflections from the Indians, the Pakistanis and the Iranians? These were neighboring people who would have the most concern.

TAYLOR: That's right. We worked very closely with the Indian and Pakistani embassies. They had large staffs and had much of the same kind of operation as we did, aid operations. They didn't have a Peace Corps naturally, but they had an economic assistance program and information programs at their embassies. The Iranians, yes, until obviously the fall of the Shah, we worked reasonably close with them. But they were never as forthcoming as the Pakistanis and the Indians. Anybody who knows South Asia knows that Indians and Pakistanis love to talk, so getting them into a conversation at a cocktail

party was quite easy and sometimes difficult to stop. They were well informed. There was no doubt that they had lots of sources that we didn't have and lots of language ability that made it easy for them and their sources to move in Afghanistan far easier than for us.

Q: Were they concerned at what was happening or was this just for the interest?

TAYLOR: The Pakistanis were very concerned, yes, they were alarmed at the direction things were going. Therefore, anything that alarms the Pakistanis pleases the Indians, of course, so the Indians were much more relaxed about the way things were going. The Indians had always had a hand in the Afghan till because it was a way of increasing their leverage over Pakistan and that had gone all the way back to support for various groups that would come across the border and raid Pakistani villages and things of that sort. So, the Indians took a very sanguine approach to the direction of new regime and the Pakistanis did not at all. Therefore, given the anti-Americanism involved, we tended to work and deal more closely with the Pakistanis even though we dealt closely with the Indians and exchanged views and to some extent affirmation. The Indians always thought we were wrong in our assessments, but that is nothing new.

Q: How did things develop after that?

TAYLOR: It didn't take long, only a matter of a couple of months before the onset of opposition out in the countryside. It wasn't only the anti-Americanism and pro-Soviet lean of the regime, it was also the communist doctrine that was coming out and within that doctrine was the anti-religion element. This wasn't played up necessarily, but it was clear to a lot of people, especially the villagers and the very devout people within Kabul that this was an anti-religion regime. The leadership in the party were known to Afghans as to what they represented, so Afghans by and large being very devout Muslims didn't want any part of the new regime. So, within a couple of months we were getting reports of actual armed clashes out in the countryside, way out in the boonies where we could no longer go. It had become too risky to make too many trips. The last trip I made down

to Peshawar, across the border, and that is a main road between Kabul and Peshawar through the Khyber Pass, was probably in August or September, 1978. After that it was no longer permitted to travel that road. They had a number of checkpoints, I recall, and there were some indications that there had been fighting along that road. You could see shot up trucks and things of that sort. So, after the fall of 1978 we were really confined to Kabul and never did see the countryside again.

Anyway, the insurgency began very, very soon after the coup. So, it was not a popular regime. It was not a popular uprising in the first place. It was a coup with a very narrow base of support and became even more narrow as time went by.

Q: Did the United States become a target as instigating this uprising?

TAYLOR: No, the regime generally took the position that the opposition in the countryside didn't exist. They didn't report it or discuss it. They wouldn't acknowledge that there was any major opposition. We did not, therefore, become a target of the regime by association that we were actually supporting this and to the best of my knowledge we were not at that point. In the early life of the Afghan story it was not a policy to do that. To the best of my knowledge most of the Mujahideen, the Afghan word for freedom fighter which became very well known in the eighties, probably got their weaponry from the fact that they all were armed in that country anyway. Everybody was armed. And then there were raids on various outlying police stations and small army posts and things of that sort. So it was all more or less a self generated kind of movement. It was not until several years later that it became a very cohesive movement, although I wouldn't call it a national movement. It became a lot of individual movements around the whole country. As we have seen since the Soviets left, it has all fallen apart, the Mujahideen unable to agree on anything.

That was the beginning of the opposition and was mostly in the countryside but there was opposition within some of the intellectual and educated circles in Kabul. In fact, we were approached by a medical doctor representing a group of medical doctors and they

wanted United States support for some kind of opposition movement within Kabul among this educated group. And we had to turn them down. We didn't want to get involve in any plot against the government with people about whom we knew nothing other than what they said they represented. That occurred in the summer of 1978. So it was only a couple of months into the regime that we were actually being approached by people claiming to have organizations behind them. That operation was rolled up about a year later and I assume all of them were shot. Remember the old doctors' plot back in the Soviet Union in the early fifties? Well, we called it the doctors' plot in Kabul. I guess they were all eliminated.

So, as we were working with the regime we realized they were not a popular movement, they were meeting quite a bit of opposition in the countryside and it was growing in the major cities as well.

Q: What about our AID and Peace Corps?

TAYLOR: They were gradually meeting more and more resistance. There was concern from a security point of view about having these people out in the countryside so gradually they were brought back from their projects and either reassigned elsewhere or stayed at headquarters and did what they could dealing with the ministries in Kabul. The Peace Corps the same way. They were gradually in effect being downsized. Actually, they were terminated after the assassination of Ambassador Dubs in February 1979. They were just totally eliminated. But they were being phased out by security concerns and the opposition of the host government six months earlier.

Q: When did Ambassador Eliot leave?

TAYLOR: He left in the summer of 1978, June or July. There was a slight gap of two or three weeks before Ambassador Dubs arrived. He arrived in the summer of 1978. There was policy discussion as to where we, the United States, should go in dealing with this kind of regime. He listened to all views but decided that we should continue doing as much

as we could to try to work with these guys despite their hostility, inefficiencies, their pro-Soviet leanings and what was becoming more and more known, the brutality of the regime and confirmed reports of opposition killings and torture. So, there were a lot of reasons, human rights concerns, ideological, political, all kinds of reasons to pull back or even close down, but he decided that we are going to keep trying as much as we could to continue the polices of working, addressing humanitarian concerns out in the countryside.

Q: You had been there awhile, how did you feel about this? Was the embassy divided whither the US role in Afghanistan?

TAYLOR: Yes, there were some divisions. There were people who argued for the concerns I just mentioned, there were valid reasons for saying this regime does not deserve American economic assistance, or Peace Corps volunteers and we should, therefore, just terminate those programs, unilaterally, and reduce the size of the embassy to just a listening post. That was, in effect, my view, but it was rejected, of course. One of Spike's great features was he listened to everybody and would not just pay you lip service. He would listen and mull it over and make his own decision.

The AID people, and not only for bureaucratic reasons, argued that they should stay and keep on doing what they had been doing and make every effort possible to be successful. I don't think it was simply they had good jobs there and didn't want to move to some place else.

The Peace Corps were pretty much ambivalent because they are pretty much exposed in a situation like that. People in Washington from the Peace Corps were very concerned about the security of their kids. Most of them in those days were still kids. It is only in the last 15 or 20 years that they began taking more and more mature people, shall we say. So, they were a little bit concerned.

The intel guys, I am a little cynical about them some times because I think they did have bureaucratic reasons for wanting to stay on and keep their fairly sizeable operation going, so they argued in effect for the policy which we were pursuing.

So there wasn't a whole lot of division. Those of us who expressed the former view were really in the minority at that time.

Q: What about the Soviet role in Afghanistan during this time?

TAYLOR: This was a constant subject of debate and analysis. Spike, of course, by that time had arrived and he was an expert on the Soviet Union having been our DCM there and I think had had three assignments in Moscow. So, he really knew how to evaluate what was going. On the public side, the press and the statements by the regime, were so pro-Soviet that it was also as though they were coming from Prague or East Berlin. The number of trade missions and scientific missions from the Soviet Union coming and going, and all kinds of activities and delegations representing this and that, just sort of swarmed over Afghanistan. If you read the information that the econ guys were coming up with, there was a sharp growth in economic assistance programs and all kinds of different activities, including agreements on the purchase of natural gas, which was the only natural resource Afghanistan had. It was basically up in the northern part of the country and therefore easy to ship over the border to the Soviet Union. So, it was quite a large presence and still growing in late 1978.

Politically it was hard to determine the exact extent of Soviet political influence. The ideology of the new regime was so pro-Soviet anyway that it was difficult to say, “Ah ha, the Soviet influence is growing,” when these guys were so receptive to the ideology that it was almost a given that the Soviets were not only the principal but perhaps the only source of advise. They weren't necessarily anxious to get into the position of being, in effect, the sole source of economic assistance of a very poor and increasingly fractured country and society. But, they recognized, I think, that their ideological soul brothers had

come to power in Kabul and one of the tenets of communist ideology, remember this is under Brezhnev and he was not exactly a flexible intellect at that time, was that once a communist revolution takes place it can never be reversed and should never be allowed to be reversed. If you remember the old phrase of correlation of forces throughout the seventies, the Soviets, I think, genuinely believed that the worldwide correlation of forces were moving in their direction just exactly the way Marx and Lenin said it would move. So, they were not receptive to the concept that a brother socialist regime could be reversed or overthrown or a revolution turned back. It just didn't happen that way. History just wouldn't allow it to happen.

They had very good people at their embassy. As you know the Soviet Foreign Service has a practice of developing experts on every area of the world and their entire career is spent in that field. They had some guys who had been in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran for 20 years and really knew the country. I am sure that some of them probably were advising Moscow..."wait a minute, this place is unstable, this regime is unstable and the opposition is growing and maybe we should not become so closely identified with it." But, obviously that view did not prevail in Moscow for reasons I just explained.

Q: What about security forces? I am thinking about secret police, intelligence police and all on the Soviet side, were they coming in?

TAYLOR: Yes, that is where we first detected a growing Soviet participation with the regime. As I said earlier, the military and the security forces had been virtually all trained in the Soviet Union, except for a minuscule number who went to the United States, Pakistan or India. So, these people were not only ideologically indoctrinated, they were indoctrinated on the training side. When the opposition started growing to a point where there might have been concerns, Soviet active participation on the security side became evident. Our intelligence guys picked it up because that was what they were watching for and were able to pick it up very quickly. We assumed that it was going on on the military side as well. There were reports of Soviet advisers showing up in various places around

the country. We couldn't really confirm those for a while, but we assumed these reports were accurate. It just made sense and seemed logical that that would happen. This was a larger presence than had been before the coup, even though there had been a Soviet presence with advisers before this particular regime came into power. So, when the Soviet activity on the security side came to the point where they were participating in some of the arrests, interrogations, torture and killings...well I don't know if they actually pulled the trigger on some of these executions, that was probably done by the Afghans, but still they had a role in this so we were watching that as carefully as possible.

Q: Did you find that surveillance of the Americans was increasing?

TAYLOR: No, I don't recall any reports that they had adopted any of the techniques that the Soviets used to surveil us in Moscow. But, of course, we couldn't travel, by this time it was impossible to travel. Our SY guys were becoming more and more nervous about the situation in Kabul, too, because we still had all the dependents there. We were very concerned about the school which was still operating because it was simply like an American high school in the middle of Kabul and a very, very vulnerable place if one were to try to launch some kind of terrorist operation. So they were getting nervous, too, and I guess they were justified in that.

So, that was the way we more or less rumbled along and the way the trends developed throughout the last half of 1978 until the great trauma of the Dubs assassination.

Q: Can you talk about, particularly from your point of view of what you knew and what you were doing at the time of the assassination? Well, it was really murder rather than assassination.

TAYLOR: Yes it was. Do you mean leading up to the assassination?

Q: Well, is there anything else you want to mention before we move to that?

TAYLOR: No. I think those were the basic trends. The growing opposition in the countryside; increasing reports that maybe the Pakistanis were helping out; to the best of my knowledge we had not become actively involved in arming the Muj as we began calling them; economic deterioration, even though it was such a poor country it was hard to measure, it was still getting worse than it had been before; increasing Soviet role, increasing dependence on the Soviets, increasing propaganda on the great brotherhood friendship between the Afghan people and the Soviet people; anti-Americanism, I think there was a sort of stonewalling against us and the active tools that we had. My particular job was to keep reporting this and analyzing it and keep telling Washington the direction that everything was going, which was not a terribly promising one. It was just downhill in effect until the Dubs murder.

On February 14, 1979 on his way to the embassy about 9:00 in the morning, Dubs was being driven in his car. He was coming down the street in front of USIS when the car was stopped by a man in a police uniform. The driver stopped because it seemed to be a legitimate representative of the government making this request to stop. He asked the driver to roll down his window and according to testimony from the driver, the driver asked Dubs if he should do it because one of the principles of security driving is not to lower your windows.

Q: Because we have armored vehicles.

TAYLOR: Right, and his was well armored. But, Dubs told the driver, again according to the driver, that he thought he should lower the window. He did, and the cop pulled his pistol and put it to the head of the driver and said to open the door. Again he said he asked Dubs and Dubs said at that point he had no option but to unlock the doors. When he did three other guys, not in police uniform, from somewhere in the vicinity jumped in the car along with the biggest cop and told him to drive to one of the hotels in downtown Kabul. So they took him to this hotel. They came through the lobby and demanded a key, again they were all armed, and took him up to a room on the 3rd or 4th floor. These guys

were not professional terrorists because one of them came back down by himself to get another key, he eventually said, and was immediately overwhelmed by the security people who had shown up by that time. So, they did some very dumb things and were not very talented guys in that particular operation. So, that left Dubs with the three others up in the hotel room. By this time the driver had returned to the embassy and reported what had happened. This is all detailed in the book if anyone wants to buy and read the book which we just recently wrote on some of these crises that we have had.

Q: You might mention the book again.

TAYLOR: It is called “Embassies Under Siege” and was published by Brassy Publications, sponsored by Georgetown University. It just came out this year. This is the chapter that I covered, the murder of Ambassador Spike Dubs. It is in quite a bit of detail.

In any event, the driver had come back to the embassy and reported to the DCM, Bruce Amstutz, what had happened and Bruce immediately alerted everybody who could possibly be concerned about that. We then established contact with the Afghan security forces and they had by that time become aware of where he was being held at the hotel and Amstutz immediately sent a team down to the hotel to see what was going on and what could be learned and what could be accomplished down there.

That team consisted of about ten guys. Bruce Flatin was the senior man on the team down there. And, as I mentioned in the book, one of the smartest things that we did at that point was to assign one of the guys at the hotel to do nothing but write down what was happening, everything, to have a complete record of who was seen, what was seen, what was said, who would make a statement to the Afghan police, and who came and went, etc. So, eventually, when everything was needed to be reported we had a complete record of what had taken place. Anyway, that was the team down at the hotel.

He sent me to the Foreign Ministry to talk with the deputy Foreign Minister who was the guy supposedly dealing with the United States on bilateral issues but had no political

power whatsoever. The Foreign Minister was really the guy who had the political power but he never dealt with United States representatives, he always shoved us off onto this deputy. I found out nothing and just told the fellow that American policy in situations like this was to do nothing that would endanger the safety of the hostage. Don't attack, don't threaten, don't show that you are going to attack or anything like that. Try to wait them out, try to find out who they are first and what they want and then try to wear them down through negotiations, but don't take any precipitous final action. He said he would take note of that and report it back, but whether he did I don't know. And that was what the guys at the hotel were telling everybody they could reach or would talk with them, that our policy was don't do anything that would endanger the ambassador's safety.

Then I returned to the embassy. That team stayed at the hotel. It was composed of several reporting officers, the doctor, SY guys. Amstutz was at the embassy trying to establish contact with Washington. We had a dreadful time with communications with Washington. As I pointed out in the book this was the old Foreign Service where you didn't have computers and you had to type up every cable and the communicator had to type it into a tape and then the State communicator would give it to the other guys to actually send it. So, it was a slow, slow process. Telephones were useless because on a good day you could barely call Peshawar in Pakistan, much less the United States. So, there was very little initial communication other than our reporting cables and Washington as well as I remember reinforced the policy of not doing anything and to tell the host government not to do anything. This was from the Secretary, it was Vance at the time and I think he had been waked up by the watch and been informed. He eventually showed up early in the morning in the Department.

Eventually Amstutz sent me over to the Ministry of Interior, which is in charge of security and we knew that the guy in charge of security, not the minister, but the actual head cop, was a real thug and had been central to all of the arrests and murders and torture and everything else. He and Hafizullah Amin, the fellow I just mentioned earlier as the Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, were very, very close so we assumed in tandem were

making decisions as to what to do in this particular situation. It was Amin's anti-American outlook that was really driving the regime's policy towards us and the pro-Soviet policy which was the opposite side of that coin. I got to Taroon's office, the chief of the security police...

Q: This is the thug.

TAYLOR: Yes, this is the thug.

I told them I was coming and they said if you want to come, come, we make no promises. So, I went over there with an Afghan driver to act as an interpreter. I could work with Dari in sort of a structured meeting with the Foreign Ministry types, diplomats, etc. or in villages, but my Dari was not good enough to really work in a tense, rapidly developing situation such as I anticipated. So, I took the driver into the office with me and explained what his role would be as an interpreter to make sure that everybody understood what my messages were. Well, I was stopped in the waiting room outside Taroon's office by a couple of gatekeepers and these guys would be formidable in any situation but when they were very heavily armed and there was a lot of tension in the air it was not the kind of situation where you try to brush them aside and charge in. They kept me waiting out there. They did take a couple of written notes that I gave them regarding “do not attack, do not do anything involving force, this is American policy and the President is going to send a message to your President as soon as possible,” etc. They took the messages and would go into Taroon's office. I could hear that there was radio communications going on all the time. I couldn't understand them, I can't understand radio communications in English the way the military communications are. So, I asked my driver if he could listen carefully and pick up anything that he could. He informed me that they were talking with the people at the hotel, the team they had at the hotel, by which time they had a lot of security people there, a lot of units that were paramilitary. I don't recall if they were army or not, they might as well have been, they were very heavily armed at the hotel.

So, that is how we were deployed for the next couple of hours. This was by now about 11:00 or 11:30. I was cooling my heels at the Interior Ministry, we had our team down at the hotel and we had Amstutz and our communicators back at the embassy trying to call back and forth. Again, the chapter in the book has a lot of detail as to what efforts we were making to get the message across. There is no doubt that the Afghan decision makers knew what our policy was and knew that we were imploring them not to take violent action. There was no question that they didn't have that message.

Let me give a little background on what was going on back at the hotel. Not only had there been a lot of Afghan security people show up at the hotel, Soviet security guys were there now and were very active and were known to embassy people and we had some of the intel guys down at the hotel and our SY people who were familiar with some of these faces. They were working very closely with the Afghan security forces. These were not Soviet armed uniform people, they were civilian, or at least dressed as civilians, and were acting in an advisory role to the Afghan security people to the extent that they were seen pointing out how to deploy the security people in the hotel across the street. They were seen giving hand signals to some of these Afghan security people as to where to move and things of that sort. So, there was no doubt in the minds of our guys at the hotel that the Soviet security people were playing a very intimate role in what was happening and what is going to happen and this, of course, led eventually to a real diplomatic spat between Washington and Moscow after the events played out.

So, that is where we were until just after 12:00 when it became obvious to the guys at the hotel that the Afghans were going to attack the room and they did. They allowed several embassy people, the doctor and a stretcher crew, to come up inside the hotel to about two rooms away from where the ambassador was being held, but no further. They were held right there, stopped. And then the guys deployed across the street at a commensurate level in that hotel, opened fire with AK-47, military automatic weapons and the guys said it was really quite a racket and went on for about 30 to 45 seconds. That length of heavy

firing by who knows how many, 10, 12, 14 guys, can really put out a lot of fire power. That particular firing stopped and the guys in the hotel corridor started to make a move towards the room, especially those with the stretcher and the doctor, and were held back by Afghan security people who themselves went down the hall and into the room. Our guys then heard, it was never agreed upon how many shots they heard, some said two, some said three, individual shots from...again some of these guys had had experience in Vietnam, and there was one military guy in that team, and they subsequently testified that they insisted that it was a small caliber handgun, it wasn't a military weapon and these guys could be seen not carrying rifles into the hotel room, they just had on normal sidearms that police and security types have. Once those shots were heard, and I can understand why some guys said two and some three since there had been a racket just before, all kinds of firing, and the adrenalin must have been flowing tremendously, so some heard two, some three, I didn't think it was a terrible discrepancy. Anyway they were allowed then to come into the room and bring the stretcher and the doctor was obviously one of the first in the hotel room. They found the ambassador's body in an easy chair in the hotel room. The doctor said he was dead; he had been shot several times. A subsequent autopsy report indicated he had been hit a couple of times with this great outbreak of shooting from across the street, but those wounds were not potentially fatal, they were just flesh wounds here and there. The fatal wounds were to the head, at close range, small caliber weapon, 22 caliber weapon, and he was dead at the scene. That was the pronouncement at the time by the embassy doctor.

So, they took him to AID's compound which is where the doctor's quarters were and at Washington's instruction he began whatever kind of medical examination of the body that he could. It wasn't the kind of facility that lent itself to this kind of thing.

I remember I could hear the initial outbreak of firing from the Ministry of Interior which was a mile away. You could faintly hear all of this happening. I remember asking the gatekeepers what had happened and they wouldn't answer. And then Taroon, in a matter of a minute or so after the initial firing came out of his office and sort of brushed past me

even though he knew who I was and who I represented and wouldn't answer. I kept asking him in Dari but he wouldn't answer. Finally one of the gatekeepers said that they had attacked and the ambassador had been killed by the terrorists. So, there wasn't much I could do at that point so I went back to the embassy and we began then the postmortem reporting of what had actually happened.

The guys at the hotel did up their report and I did up my report. We put all of these into a massive report which was subsequently accused by some of the media as being too cold, I guess is the way they said it, too official, and unemotional. I don't know what they expected us to say, but we had to get all of the information down and reported as accurately as we could. I guess it didn't read like Time magazine and they felt it should have. It showed up in the New York Times in a couple of days, it was leaked. The reason it was leaked was the Soviet angle because Washington took the report we had and what leaped out at them was the Soviet role in all of this. They called in Dobrynin, the Soviet Ambassador at the time, and Vance really pounded the table with Dobrynin saying this was absolutely an inappropriate role for the Soviet government to play especially given the outcome.

Q: You are back at the embassy, what was the feeling about what had happened? First what was this whole thing about, the initial kidnaping, and then the security response?

TAYLOR: We were all stunned and outraged and, of course, emotionally stretched by what had happened. So, we really didn't focus on why and what it was all about at that time. That, of course, became a focus in subsequent days, but it wasn't at that particular moment. We had just lost an ambassador so we were all focusing on what to do about that. We were getting messages that the White House was sending Air Force Two or Three, and a whole delegation of senior officials from State, including the widow, Mary Ann Dubs, who was back here working on the Hill at the time, to come out and get the body and bring it back for a state funeral. So, we were really overwhelmed with reporting and responding to those kinds of issues, that afternoon, rather than why and who the people

were. Although before the actual killing and while there was still dialogue on the scene we were asking what did the Afghan government know about who these guys were, were they making demands, what was their objective, and never got any information or response other than we don't know who they are.

But your question and the focus is exactly what became our major concerns within a matter of the next day. Every resource we had was focused on these exact issues. Unfortunately we never learned who these guys were and who they represented and what their objectives were. The three terrorists who were in the room were all dead and the guy who had been captured alive turned up dead that night. A couple of guys from the embassy were called over to identify the bodies. So, this guy who had been taken alive and could have possibly provided information on these particular questions was murdered by the regime to shut up everybody who would have been involved in that room and what had happened and what demands they may have made. It was never clarified who they were or what their objective was. There were rumors everywhere, of course, but no firm evidence as to what they wanted. The most convincing report I saw was an intel report several months later that said that these particular people were supported and were members of a very leftist organization, a splinter group from the Afghan left, basically identified with the Communist Chinese and who were so radical they were even hostile to the regime that I described earlier. If they were that radical they were really crazies, and they had somehow come to the conclusion that kidnaping and holding the American Ambassador hostage would somehow give them leverage over the regime in Kabul. That shows you how out of touch they really were because that regime could care less about the security of our ambassador as demonstrated by their action.

The VIP delegation and Mary Ann arrived the next day and stayed one night. We had a memorial ceremony at the residence. She chose me to come back as the embassy representative. The Department in Washington had agreed to have one person go back with the delegation to represent the embassy community at the funeral and she asked me to do that. So, I did and was honored to do so. We got back to Washington and

between the arrival and the funeral the next day, which happened to occur during the great blizzard of 1979 but we were still able to hold the funeral in Arlington, the experts did an official autopsy on the body and that report was highly classified at the time but was made available to me and certain people at the embassy in Kabul. That concluded and proved, as well as our guys can do it, that the fatal wounds were caused by a small caliber gun to the head from close range. In effect, they put it to his head and murdered him. I believe that Mary Ann knew that. I never asked her if she had access to the autopsy report, but somebody told me that she was aware of this, that the conclusive forensic evidence pointed to this kind of action that killed him.

We never were able to say officially that that is what happened. I think the guys who make these kinds of decisions probably concluded that we couldn't say that and make it stick in an American court of law so they probably decided that we can almost conclude but not absolutely for certain that this was the cause of death. So they probably fudged it a little bit that way. And this is mentioned in the chapter I wrote in the book. But, my belief and that of a number of people with whom I have talked to are convinced that that is what happened in that hotel room.

Q: Well, who went in? Was it a Soviet security person?

TAYLOR: No, Afghans. The Soviets were not involved in the hotel room at that time. They were in the advisory capacity down in the lobby, across the street and down on the street prior to the actual assault on the room. To the best of my memory there were no Soviets involved in the corridor either. I don't recall that any of our guys there claimed to see a Soviet at that little point in the drama. I don't recall that anyone said a Soviet was actually involved in going into the room. They could have gone to the trouble of dressing up a Soviet of an Afghan ethnic group as an Afghan, but that is kind of stretching it.

Q: Now, you have returned from Washington to the embassy and it is basically confirmed that the Afghan security forces very likely killed the ambassador.

TAYLOR: Well, back up a little bit. While I was here, I stayed in Washington for about a week, there were any number of discussions about the policy implications of this. What do we know and what do we do about it? There were again arguments about the hostility of the regime and its pro-Soviet leanings. Now, they have taken an action and generally it was not widely known that it was probable that they had actually murdered the ambassador, but whatever the case they had ignored our pleas to not take any action. They had ignored the safety of the ambassador. If he had been killed in that military assault, that would have been cause enough to result in tremendous strains in the bilateral field. But we were making the argument that they had taken actions which resulted in the death of our ambassador. They had ignored whatever we had said. We had by that time delivered pleas from President Carter and Secretary Vance. So there was a lot of hostility in Washington, both on the political and diplomatic front, as to what to do about it and what our reaction should be. So, there were some debates in the Department as to what to do.

To summarize a long story, we decided to terminate all Aid operations, all Peace Corps operations and all economic assistance operations in the country. It turned out to be moot in any case because Congress subsequently, fairly quickly for Congress, passed legislation that said that this was to be our policy, they were going to terminate all funding of all assistance programs until such time as the Afghan government took responsibility for the death of the ambassador. And, of course, they were never going to do that, so in effect you had the Executive deciding a policy and it being imposed by Congress on the other side. So there was no question but that we were going to just close up operations, which we did gradually. By the summer of 1979, over the next three or four months, everything was phased out. AID was gone and the Peace Corps was gone and we began phasing down dependents to the point where we just had essentially a listening post. It wasn't as small as it became after the Soviet invasion, but it was pretty limited. We still had econ, admin and consular officers, but after the Soviet invasion we downsized even more.

Q: The embassy was being run by a charg#?

TAYLOR: Yes, a charg#. There was never another ambassador sent. There was only a charg# for the next ten years. We eventually closed down in 1989 completely, but for the next ten years we had a very slim operation from the Soviet invasion to the Soviet withdrawal.

Q: What was the atmosphere in the embassy when you came back?

TAYLOR: Very tense and very emotional and very uncertain as to why this had happened. Dubs was held in tremendous regard by the whole community. It was a real shock and people were outraged and, of course, they knew by then, by the time I got back, that we were phasing out everything that had to do with working with the regime on a broad front. As I said, it was a very large AID operation, one of the largest in terms of people in the world. So, the community in effect was going to be down 60 or 70 percent by the time all of them left. The school would be closed and all kinds of things.

Q: In your work as a political officer, did things change particularly as far as relations, bad as they were, with the government?

TAYLOR: They were fairly limited with any kind of contact with the host government and so it didn't really get worse. It was hard to say how it could get worse than it was. But, the hostility of the regime remained at the level that it was. The trends tended to continue and to the best that we could see there was virtually no reaction on the part of the regime to the fact that we were going to phase out AID, etc. They simply seemed to say they could care less. My particular job continued to be analyzing as best I could the political trends and things, but they were already in place and the fact that we were phasing out all of the meaningful operations that we had going, sort of meant that my work was going to be even more limited in access and information available. It was going to be even more limited than it had been.

So, we were focusing, we in the political and the intel side, were focusing on the issues of the growing opposition in the countryside, what the Soviet role was in all of this. Those were basically the two major things, and without any major operation by AID and the Peace Corps there wasn't much else to do. I think the econ section focused on trade figures with the Soviets and whatever they could pick up in terms of production, agricultural production in the countryside. Was the opposition causing economic problems? Things like that.

Q: Were you seeing growing opposition from whatever vantage point you had there?

TAYLOR: Yes, in 1979 the reports, and believable reports, that were coming in indicated that the opposition, the Mujahideen, was becoming more and more organized and better armed. There were various gun fights in some of the major cities, Qandahar and in the north. There had been a curfew in Kabul ever since the coup of April, 1978, from 11:00 until 6:00 in the morning. It was wise to be in your compound by 10:30 because you didn't want to be on the street with nervous Afghan GIs. You could hear gun fire at night periodically.

And there were incidents of opposition within the military several times throughout those months. There would be an outbreak of fighting within Kabul by dissident military. This didn't happen only at night, a couple of times it happened during the day. Everybody hunkered down and tried to figure out what was going on and trade notes.

One of the major outbreaks was in Herat, over in western Afghanistan near the Iranian border, when the Mujahideen mounted, along with some dissident military units, a major attack on the city specifically aiming at the Soviet presence. Apparently there was a large Soviet operation over there in terms of assistance, including dependents. There were a number of reports, which I believe were accurate, of deaths among these Soviet dependents along with Soviet advisers and security people. And lots of Afghans were killed in that particular incident. That caused tremendous reaction by the regime and by

the Soviets and also among our SY people who became even more concerned about the safety of those of us still remaining. We were all in Kabul, but they felt if this could happen in Herat, it could happen in Kabul as well. I don't remember the exact date of that particular incident, but it was in the early fall of 1979. In retrospect, I think that particular incident was probably incidental, to some degree, in the Soviet decision to invade later that year in December. They had lost personnel and therefore they couldn't say they would just write the losses off, they had to do something to justify those losses, especially the dependents.

Q: There must have been almost a feeling of satisfaction seeing this regime having problems, wasn't there?

TAYLOR: Well, I suppose. There was a debate within the embassy, and I suppose within Washington too, as to how much trouble it was in. How do you measure something like that when the information we had was pretty sparse, although accurate, I think. How long could it last? Did it make any difference that the Mujahideen controlled the wastelands of Afghanistan when the regime was in solid control in Kabul and the big cities? So, we went along for the remaining few months of the year debating that and eventually got to the point of addressing the issue of what would the Soviets do if things really got bad. Then, of course, you get into the bureaucratic problem of, “Hey, we are the embassy in Kabul and are not supposed to be reporting on what the Soviets will or will not do, that is embassy Moscow's job.” Of course, everything we sent out went info to Moscow and a couple of times they came back and in effect told us to mind our own business.

And oddly enough, a little anecdote, it got to the point where I had to draft the reporting messages on this issue in the context of: Will the Afghan regime ask Moscow to send troops and help save the regime? If so, what do the Afghans think the response will be? That is how we got around that particular bureaucratic problem, because we, in Kabul, concluded that the Afghans were going to ask for help eventually and the Afghans believe that the Soviets will respond positively and send troops to help them out. Embassy Moscow, in this particular debate, constantly took the position that the Soviets would not

send troops to Afghanistan. It was just outside their vital sphere of interest and they don't belong to the Warsaw Pact, and all of the reasons that it just made good sense for Soviet specialists. So, therefore, you had the two opposing positions. We could not say, “Yes, they will send troops,” we said in effect, “Yes, the Afghans believe that the response will be a positive one when they request it [not if they request it].”

Q: Had the regime shaken down by this time to a particular kind of leadership?

TAYLOR: Yes, it had. The fellow who I mentioned was the titular head of the regime, the president, was, himself, shot at one of these cabinet meetings in September, 1979. Hafizullah Amin, the foreign minister and deputy prime minister, as a result of that ascended to be officially the number one, not just the official number two. He was the guy who was probably the most brutal ideologue among the political leadership. There were lots of other thugs worse than he was, but not among the top leadership. Yes, some of the more “reasonable” people among the cabinet political leadership had been replaced by other people. Naturally, as every political officer does you look at the cabinet members and their background and are constantly reporting on who has changed portfolios, etc. So, by the time we got to late 1979, Amin and his identified loyalists were in solid control. There wasn't anybody who could be identified as a member of the non-Amin faction of the political party. There were two factions in the Afghan left movement and there was always a competition and struggle between the two to dominate the results of the 1978 coup, the great revolution of 1978, as they called it. By 1979 Amin and his faction had prevailed and many of the members of the other faction had actually been exiled as ambassadors to various countries. To jump ahead, these were people who the Soviets brought back in December, 1979 and put into power when they invaded. So, they put into power a less radical group of the leadership.

Q: What was your perspective and the embassy's of the events that led up to the December action, both within Kabul and then the Soviet invasion?

TAYLOR: We were constantly reporting on the opposition movement. We were getting rumors in Kabul and there would be these events in Herat and a gun fight in Qandahar, and then a report that a complete village had been taken over by the Mujahideen. So that was what our focus was. Another focus was, what does that mean for the staying power of the regime? Does it mean it is going to be overthrown? If so, by whom and how? There was a difference there. My opinion was that whoever controlled Kabul was in essence in charge of the country; a lot of the countryside didn't make that much difference, politically. Some people were arguing that if the trends continued this way, the rotten apple has to fall. I didn't necessarily agree with that. We were also focusing, again, on the Soviet role and trying to identify the best we could what that involvement amounted to, the extent, the level and the nature of that involvement. What we were really focusing on was identification, if at all possible, of active Soviet military troops. Did anybody ever see Soviet troops in Afghanistan.

Q: As opposed to an adviser.

TAYLOR: That's right. Were they active and attached to a Soviet unit that was there as opposed to an advisory role.

So these three major elements were essentially about all we did because everybody else was gone. My wife was director of the American Center in downtown Kabul, I think we had 3 or 4 female employees who remained in town after the great downsizing, and she was still running the English teaching programs which were very, very popular. Hundreds of students would still come to the American Center despite the nature of the bilateral relationship and the attitude of the regime. So, you could use that as a barometer to some degree as to the activity and the success of what the American Center was doing. But, she was just hanging on by her fingernails in terms of trying to think up useful activities and programs aside from teaching English, and we didn't have too many other programs that were working.

So this was the focus of everything up to December 27, 1979 when the Soviets invaded.

Q: Was there something that precipitated the invasion?

TAYLOR: The extent of the brutality of the regime was becoming increasingly clear. Actually Amin had the Soviets in a great bear hug. His pro-Soviet ideology and propaganda was embracing the Soviets, I think, to a degree that was considered intolerable by Afghanistan's conservative society and the opposition was growing. The only conclusion that I can draw from the Soviet decision was that they had concluded that the regime was going to be overthrown and that the only way to prevent a reversal of this socialist revolution was to take direct action to prevent the downfall of the brother revolution. And, so they did.

Q: So, there was nothing that happened in Kabul?

TAYLOR: Not a precipitating event. I read somewhere that a respected Soviet watcher said that the decision to make that invasion was made very abruptly with no precipitating event. Very suddenly, Brezhnev and his closest allies, decided Afghanistan was going down-hill, let's invade.

Q: And we are really talking about an increase in the senile, or at least not very competent leadership at that time, particularly on Brezhnev's part?

TAYLOR: Yes, I think so. I think that has been portrayed by a lot of people in subsequent years, that he was really gone mentally several years before he actually died. I haven't read anybody who has said who was actually having the most influence on the decision-making process...was it the security guys, the military, the foreign ministry, the apparatchiks in the Party? Somebody may be working on that, but I haven't seen it in print as to who was having the most influence on the decision making process at that time. It will come out, especially with all of the information that is coming out now and probably will be available soon as to what happened and why. You could conclude now the fact that

nobody has written it up and analyzed it points to the fact that such an abrupt and closely held decision indicates there was no staff work. That they just sat around schmoozing one night and said, “Let's go into Afghanistan.”

Q: All of that group died within a few years anyway for physical reasons. So, Christmas Eve, you weren't sitting around saying, “Oh, my God, something is going to happen,” or something like that?

TAYLOR: Actually, you know the way it all started, it was Christmas morning, the 25th of 1979, about 5:00 in the morning, and I was 90 percent asleep and 10 percent awake, when my wife nudges me and says, “Why does that plane keep flying over all of the time? What is he doing flying in circles?” So, I woke up a little more and realized that about every 15 seconds a plane would go over the house. I thought that was a strange thing. Remember this is December and Kabul is about 7,000 feet, so it is winter time and you normally have no air operations in the dark in Afghanistan. It was still dark. About 6:00 I went out in the front yard with binoculars to try to figure out what was going on and I could see just above the house and therefore all around Kabul, planes stacked fifteen high. They were in a downward spiral of approaching and as high as I could see with the binoculars. Their last approach was over the house. It was still curfew and I thought this was really weird. Having been an Air Force Intel officer I could identify the kinds of transports. They had all kinds of different planes coming in, all Soviet marked. None of it was Afghan. By the time the curfew was off, I jumped in the jeep and headed out to the airport and talked my way through a couple of roadblocks until I got to the airport when a couple of guys told me to go back. These were nervous Afghans and by that time you could see organized Soviet units being off loaded and deployed around Kabul. So, I returned.

By then, Christmas Day, everybody got in contact with everybody else and we were trying to figure out what was happening. You could just drive and see that these units were being deployed all around Kabul. By then we were asking ourselves what this meant and why.

So, for the next two days it continued, this constant airlift. It was nothing that anybody had ever seen before, such an aerial deployment of units. I suppose it probably happened in Czechoslovakia in 1968. So we were out in the streets, and we had the attach# guys and intel guys out reporting back what they were seeing. But, you could just sit in the front yard of the embassy and lose count of the airplanes arriving. Our conclusion at that time, because nobody could perceive what was coming, was that the Soviets had decided to provide backbone, to demonstrate to the Muj that the Soviet commitment is real and they are willing to send in all kinds of active participation.

Q: Were you able to talk to the Soviets, the Indians, the Pakistanis, or anyone else at that time?

TAYLOR: Yes. We consulted with the Indians and the Paks, but the Soviet embassy people wouldn't see us.

Q: Today is February 12, 1996. Jim, we had you watching planes coming in. What were you doing in the embassy while this was happening?

TAYLOR: The morning of Christmas, as I recounted, began with this massive airlift of troops and equipment into Kabul and we in the embassy were going around town and doing everything possible to report what was going on. It was impossible to hide something as massive as that. So for the next two days that is what we did. We scouted around outside the city as far as we could, but travel was very controlled and limited. We watched from the embassy, which was very near the airport, all of the aerial resupply and bringing in of Soviet airborne troops. They would be deployed throughout the city. For the next couple of nights you could see a massive movement of troops and equipment around the town. And then, on the 27th of December, it was like the previous two days with nothing too eventful or out of the ordinary, we were at home and my wife was giving a holiday party for her staff at USIS because she and the PAO were the only ones left in the USIA operation. So, there were about 40-45 people, some families had come, at the

house, and all of a sudden, about 7:00 at night, already dark, there was a loud explosion and the telephone sort of jingled and almost jumped off the desk. I picked it up and it was dead. There were no phone communications throughout the city. We subsequently learned that the Post, Telephone and Telegraph (PTT) office and building in downtown Kabul, had been one of the primary and initial targets of the Soviets in terms of knocking out communications throughout the city.

Q: Just to go back, the Soviets put a hell of a lot of stuff in there. Were there military people saying, "Well, I have counted planes and there must be the equivalent of a brigade or a division?" We must have been trying to figure out what they were up to.

TAYLOR: We had made identifications of active Soviet units. They were right there on the streets and moving around and from patches, etc. on their uniforms you could tell who they were. It was clear that there was a Soviet airborne division deployed in and around Kabul with some light airmobile armored equipment. Not heavy tanks, they couldn't fly those in at that point, so they had light armored equipment. The general wisdom, after asking ourselves for several days what is going on and what are the Soviets up to, which seemed to be accepted in Washington and in Moscow and every other Soviet watching place around, was that they were aiming to provide backbone, if you will, to the Afghan military effort. The Afghan military forces were having trouble with the Mujahideen in the countryside and there had been, as I mentioned earlier, some cases of mutiny and revolts within the military against the regime. So, we all in the embassy, I don't recall that anybody ever expressed a differing viewpoint, believed that the Soviet forces were there to provide some kind of stiffening to their allies, because they had, in fact, been allies. They had just the previous year signed a new Soviet-Afghan friendship treaty which superseded one that had been signed in the 1920s, I believe, so were considered their allies. There was no indication or speculation, at that time, that they were there to do what they eventually did on the 27th.

Q: In other words, from a practical point of view it really hadn't changed the situation?

TAYLOR: No, the main thing that changed was that you had on the ground in a foreign country outside the Warsaw Pact, Soviet active military forces, which was highly unusual and was being watched by everybody in the whole US government and other governments as to what they were doing and how they were going about it. Of course, you can't move that many troops and equipment without it being picked up by the guys who listen for those kinds of things. So, they were being tracked by the NSA and everybody else. But, the policy objective of what they were trying to do was, of course, what anybody could analyze and talk about and report on. Across the board it was concluded that they were there to provide this stiffening to the regime.

Q: Were you getting this from the Afghans, too?

TAYLOR: More or less in the rumor mill. Mind you there were only three days in which this happened, so the rumor mill really hadn't had a chance to find out a whole lot. But, most of the Afghans were extremely worried about what was going on at that point. What was their country coming to, it was being occupied? Something was happening when you have a massive influx of very good Soviet units. They were top line troops, not second rate.

Q: So, anyway, we are back with the telephone failure.

TAYLOR: The actual attack took place beginning, as well as I can remember, about 7:00 in the evening on the night of the 27th. The PTT office was one of the first targets hit and we subsequently learned it was deliberately knocked out for the purpose of disrupting communications among the Afghans. A second major target was Afghan Radio and Television operations which were right next to the embassy. They were hit very quickly by fast moving Soviet armored units of this airborne division. That was being watched by our marine guards who had these externally mounted cameras and they could watch that, because once the firing started they, of course, didn't know what was going on. Everybody was alert, of course, to the movements of the Soviet troops around Kabul, but nobody really expected an outbreak of fighting, an actual attack.

Q: There hadn't been any noticeable deployment of Afghan troops to counter the ...?

TAYLOR: Not that we could detect. They were normally deployed around strategic points like the PTT, the palace, etc. but we didn't see any great buildup and there was none. The attack as it unfolded surprised the Afghan government and Amin, as much as it surprised everybody else. He didn't expect his so-called allies to turn on him in such a vicious way as they did.

Immediately after the telephone incident you began hearing a lot of heavy firing around, explosions and there were tracer rounds going through the sky and a couple of the search lights had been turned on. These lights had been used during the curfew to illuminate certain areas of the town. Of course, we didn't know what was actually happening except that it was obvious that a lot of fighting was going on.

I had to decide whether to stay at the house where we had 40 or so people there when this broke out, or head for the embassy because that was generally what we did. We tried to get enough people to the embassy during these various crises that had happened ever since the April, 1978 coup, so that we could report and inform Washington about the situation, not only the political and military situation, but the situation of the American community that was still in Kabul and operating. So, I decided to head for the embassy and leave my wife in charge of her party, and took off in the Jeep that I had at the time.

So, I was driving very slowly down some of the back streets heading towards the embassy. On one fairly large, four lane, divided, residential street, I was going no more than ten miles an hour, not wanting to attract anybody's attention who might conclude that I was fleeing or something, I saw coming towards me two headlights which were sort of bouncing. I thought it had to be some kind of Pakistani truck, some of them are not in terribly good condition, that was just on the wrong side of the road being confused and driving on the left...we drove on the right in Afghanistan, but as you know everybody drives on the left in Pakistan and India like the British. It wasn't until maybe 20 or 30 yards that

I saw that those headlights were on the front of a Soviet armored vehicle with infantry on top moving towards me. So, I did a very quick left turn bouncing over the median that was in the middle of the street, and this column went past. There must have been 10 or 15 armored vehicles in that column all with infantry mounted on top.

That was a little bit of a jolt so I was very careful to get on the main highway that went to the airport and passed in front of the embassy. I turned on all of the interior lights of the car, wanting to make certain that nobody would mistake me for something else, and got to the entrance of the embassy and turned in. Oddly enough, one of our embassy guards was still at the gate and he was extremely agitated, I recall. He didn't know what was going on. I could see that there were several larger, standard, heavy armor, T-55 tanks and T-62s down in the front of the Afghan Radio. Those were the ones usually used by the Afghan army and were Soviet supplied. I made it into the embassy and at that point we had about 3 or 4 marine guards in the embassy, 2 communicators, and myself. At that time, given the holidays, even though we had a small community, it was even smaller because several officers had gone to India or Pakistan for vacation and things of that sort, and some were in Western Europe. So, as it turned out I was the acting DCM, although I was reasonably junior. It turned out that after the Charg# I was the senior FSO there.

I tried the phones again but they were dead. I started calling on the radio to the Charg#, who was Bruce Amstutz at the time and who lived farther from the embassy than I did. He said the fighting in front of his place and in the neighborhood was such that he didn't think it was safe to try to get to the embassy. So, he did not leave his house, but we were in radio communication.

And then about that time the security officer showed, Fred Lecker, who had come over the back wall, if I remember. He had been able to get over from his residence which was very near the embassy so he didn't have to drive. We agreed that he would focus on trying to establish the security and whereabouts of everyone in the community through our radio net, which we had tested and was working much better than it had in the coup of 1978. So,

he was able to focus on that. I was focusing on communications with Amstutz and trying to find out what anybody could see and what was happening in the area at least around the embassy where we could see what was going on.

And so, after about 30 minutes, three or four other officers had shown up. The senior military guy was a warrant officer, all the commissioned officers were on leave. He was there, a couple of CIA guys and a communicator for each agency was available in the embassy. So, we had about 10 or 11 people and that was maximum. After about 30-45 minutes the fighting around Afghan Radio broke out again. You could hear some wounded troops yelling and screaming in the night and you could see some had been taken prisoner by the Soviet troops.

Q: By this time it was obvious that the Soviets were fighting Afghan military.

TAYLOR: Yes, that's right. At one point, as I said, the marine guard sitting there very early on had seen Soviet troops drive up in front of Afghan Radio and open fire on the Afghans who were guarding Afghan Radio.

Q: To just get the state of mind at the time, at this point you knew the Soviets were doing it, but did you know what they were about?

TAYLOR: Well, we sort of said, “What the hell is going on?” We could see what was going on, but didn't know why.

The general wisdom in that first hour or so was that there had been a split in the Afghan military. That somebody in the Afghan military had decided that he wasn't going to have his country occupied by the Soviet Union, so he and his troops and units decided to attack the Soviets and the regime, and that was what was happening. So, in that case one would have, obviously as we had seen in the past...we had seen Afghans fighting Afghans ever since the coup, and the Soviets were on one side, presumably on the side of the regime.

That was what we presumed. It turned out not to be the case, of course, but at any rate that was what we thought.

And then we had these indications that the Soviets had attacked Afghan Radio because our marine guards had seen the Soviets surround the building and actually occupy it. And then you try to figure out why would the Soviets attack Afghan Radio, which was the mouthpiece of the regime and presumably loyal to the regime. We couldn't answer that at that particular point because a lot of stuff was happening in the neighborhood. The fighting would flare up and then quiet down and flare up again. After about an hour and watching the deployment of the troops around Afghan Radio, we could watch it from the roof of the embassy which had an enclosure on top with cinder block walls that you could look over. There were three or four of us up on the top of the embassy watching and in communication with everybody. Fred Lecker and the SY guys were trying to find out where everybody was.

The view from the embassy was very clear on the Afghan Radio side. I decided at the time that I wanted all of the lights in the compound left on. I wanted it as brightly lighted as possible. I didn't want anybody to be able to make the case for misidentification because it was dark, etc. So, I told Fred to keep all of the lights on, everywhere throughout the compound. I had one of the marines put the flag back up so there would be no question that this was the American embassy. And then all of a sudden I recall seeing one Afghan troop come running out of someplace carrying an RPG, which was a rocket propelled grenade and antitank weapon. He stopped about 100 yards from us and let loose with that at a Soviet vehicle and the whole thing just blew apart. And then the fighting flared up very, very quickly and became very violent. A couple of tanks were knocked out and if you have ever been near a tank that goes off and the shells going off inside, the whole neighborhood felt they were just rocking and rolling...

Q: Had you made communication with the United States by this time?

TAYLOR: Only through telegraph. We had sent FLASH messages back to Washington telling as best as we could tell what had happened. That there was firing taking place. We told them who was at the embassy and what we were doing, what we could see, and that we were trying to make contact with all of the American staff. So we were in constant contact in an outgoing sense with Washington, Moscow, Pakistan, the posts which we felt would be interested in what was going on. And that was not an easy operation because there were no secretaries there and what I had to do in effect was to just hand write on a legal pad, reporting messages and give it to a communicator who had to type it into the machine himself from my handwritten notes. And various other officers from every agency, the ones that were there, were writing it up as well because somebody would be up on the roof and I would be somewhere else. So, whoever saw something, would immediately come down and write up a message and give it to the communicator and they would send it up. I imagine a lot of it was disjointed reporting and not very clear and perhaps not very cogent, but that was the way we were working.

And, so the fighting would flare up. At that point when the first major flare up occurred, and the embassy had been hit a couple of times with machine gun fire, nothing heavy, I decided that it was time to institute the final phase of our burn operation. We had drawn down all of our paperwork to I think what we estimated to be a 15 minute burn time. I told, Fred, who was in charge of the Marines, to give them orders to institute the final burn. So, they went through all of the safes and burned everything. Unfortunately they got a few passports, money, savings accounts documents, etc., which sort of ticked off a few people. But the situation was tense and one that nobody had ever faced before, and the Marines were just kids at the time and were probably as nervous as anybody and a little over reactive by burning everything they found. Anyway, it eventually straightened itself out and those of us who had cash burned received repayment from the Department.

Another minor detail was, well it might not have been minor if anything had happened...Fred had had these Marine guards heavily armed with shotguns and 45s, etc.

and I told Fred that that was a Soviet Airborne division out there on the street and three or four guys with shotguns were not going to be any kind of defense, so don't have any fantasy about defending the embassy. If anybody walks in and they want to come in here, they can come in here. We are not going to resist. It would be foolhardy to try to resist. So, if these guys want to walk around with shotguns and 45s they can, but they are not going to use them. It is a direct order that they are not going to use them against anybody. Well, he understood that.

But, there was never an incident of that kind, although we were hit a few times and once on the roof. I was up there with two or three of the guys and they were watching over at the Afghan Radio and somebody fired over our heads. I assumed it was over our heads to get us to stop watching them so carefully and one burst hit the wall right beside where I was. Fortunately the cinder block stopped it so it wasn't a heavy weapon. So, at that point I decided it was a little too risky to be sitting up there in that particular place and Fred agreed, so we ceased and desisted for a couple of hours. But eventually we sent one or two guys up at a time for observation, but not a whole crowd.

So, that was where we were for the rest of the night. The fighting would flare up and come back down, flare up and come back down. We were able to establish the welfare and whereabouts of all but two of the staff. One of the secretaries turned her radio off and hadn't decided to turn it back on, so she was safe at home but we didn't know that. I can't remember who the other person was. We eventually found out the next morning where they were, they radioed in. But, Washington was concerned about the welfare of the staff, and obviously so. And, that was a bit of concern the rest of the night, as to where these two people were because there was a lot of fighting in the areas where people had residences and apartments in the area around the embassy.

During the periods when it would be fairly quiet, we would send messages back to Washington sort of analyzing what we could, telling them our opinions, what we could see and things like that. At one point I wrote a message that so far as we could tell there hadn't

yet been any instances where Afghans were fighting Afghans, that it seemed to be solely a Soviet/Afghan fight, and, this addresses the point you made earlier, what we might be seeing.

From the embassy we couldn't tell a whole lot, but we knew there was fighting on the other side of town where the regime leadership was. Amin had taken up residence across town and you could see a lot of fighting over in that direction. There was no air power used at all as opposed to the coup in 1978. No aircraft were heard all night long doing anything, no helicopter or anything. That indicated that somehow the regime had been grounded, at least that is what our assessment was.

So, because of these very admittedly flimsy pieces of evidence, if you will, we sent the first message in saying that what we might be seeing is a Soviet coup d'etat aimed at the regime. I subsequently learned a couple of months later that when that message hit Washington everybody thought that was out in left field, a crazy notion.

So, we were more or less deployed that way with us trapped at the embassy and Bruce Amstutz at his residence. Through radio contact we knew where everybody was, except for the two people I mentioned earlier. So, we felt that if everybody just stayed put we were in fair enough shape if nothing further happened, such as a Soviet decision to occupy the embassy or something like that, which would have caused all kinds of different questions to be raised as to how we behave and what happened next.

On two occasions that I recall, we knew that people had come over the wall into the embassy compound. I saw one on a camera and someone else said that they had seen somebody come over. The one I saw was in an Afghan military uniform, so it must have been a troop trying to get away from the Soviets in some way, and presume it was the same thing with the second incident, but nobody came to the door or sought refuge. No Soviet came to the gate insisting that we cease and desist what we were doing or anything of that sort.

So, it more or less stayed that way for the rest of the night. We subsequently learned that the Soviets had attacked Amin's compound where he was staying and gunned down his particular bodyguards, a special unit for his protection, and they had all been wiped out. They burst in on him and he, I guess, drew a gun or something like that, and they shot him and all of his other aides at the time. So, that particular regime disappeared.

A couple of the embassy guards had stayed at their post at the gate, but then when the fighting really got bad, I told them if they wanted to they could come in the embassy and go down into the basement where it might be a little bit safer. I then had them the rest of the night stay next to a commercial radio and about 5:00 in the morning they told me they were picking up a very faint signal in Dari an announcement by the leader of the Afghan leftist faction that was opposed to the one in power under Amin. He was saying that he was in charge and was going to take over with the great friendship and help of the Soviet Union and that he would be making further announcements and statements when required. So, that was our first indication that the Soviets had in fact decided to bring back and sponsor, if you will, and put into power another Afghan, leftist regime. Maybe they felt that could be more effective, or more acceptable to the people, or something. I think the Soviet analysis and decision making in this whole thing was really flawed from the beginning.

Q: What was your reaction to this? Why would the Soviets do this?

TAYLOR: Well, that is a very good question and we were asking ourselves why they did this. What is going on, what do they expect to do or achieve? I think everybody assumed that the Soviet army would not face any serious challenge on the Afghan scene because they would be just too overwhelmingly powerful to be opposed effectively by any segment of Afghan society, the Mujahideen, or the Afghan army, even. And, so, given that assumption, it was more or less felt that what they were thinking they were going to do was to get rid of this regime that was ineffective, bring back another one that was an ideological brother to Moscow, and again, representing the ideological requirement not

to allow a socialist revolution to be reversed, and back it up with Soviet military force that could not be opposed by any Afghans who were just a bunch of villagers anyway. That was how we thought the Soviets were thinking.

But there were two things that we at the time, “we” meaning almost every analyst involved, didn't know that were the keys over the next decade of fighting between the Soviets and the Muj. One was that the Soviets imposed upon themselves a maximum number of troops to be deployed in Afghanistan. It was about 140,000, or something like that. So, therefore, by imposing this limit on themselves, they did not in effect apply the overwhelming force that they could have done, they physically had it, the Soviet army was huge, as we all know, and well equipped, but they didn't. The second factor that we didn't know anything about at the time was the extent to which we and other countries would support the Mujahideen in providing arms, training, etc. That program hadn't been created. So, those two factors were the keys leading to the Soviet problems in Afghanistan that led to their decision to pull out, that it wasn't worth it. But, at the time we thought that the Brezhnev Doctrine of overwhelming force would apply, although it turned out not to be the case. Although 140,000 troops is a lot of force in a country like Afghanistan, it turned out not to be adequate to either occupy the whole country effectively or destroy the whole Mujahideen effectively.

The Soviets in the next two days sent in over 100 thousand troops across the northern border which were deployed through Qandahar and Herat and everywhere in the country. Obviously they had already established control of Kabul, so they were pretty much in charge.

The next morning, the morning of the 28th, it was very strange. After all of the events the night before there were people out trying to pursue their normal everyday life. You could see guys driving donkey carts down the streets and trying to go about their business. It was very bizarre because right in the midst of this there were burned out tanks...they had gotten most of the bodies off the streets by the next morning and I don't think anybody

saw any grim results of the night's fighting except for burned out equipment that was still around. I went out on the streets the next morning when it became obvious that the Soviets were not going to impose a curfew right at dawn, because people were up walking around. So, I walked over to a couple of Soviet GIs next to Afghan Radio and tried to chat them up a little bit, asking obvious questions like where did they come from and what were they doing here and what was their unit? I was able to use my Russian. The basic answer that these guys had was that they came in last night and didn't know why they were there, they were just following orders. After about five minutes an officer came over and told me to go back and mind my own business, and so I did.

Life among the embassy staff was finally sorting itself out. We did find out where those other two people were. Everybody had been a bit nervous over night, but nobody had been hurt. I made contact with my wife and she said some of the Afghans were so nervous they got fairly drunk during the night and had passed out not knowing what was going on. They woke up the next morning and were told that their country had been invaded.

Q: Now, you keep using the term "invasion." Was it an invasion?

TAYLOR: I think you can call it an invasion. Using forceful deployment of that many troops into a foreign country, I think is an invasion, especially when you take into account the destruction of the host regime, your so-called allies. If they had, in fact, come in simply as backbone for the host regime, which obviously the regime thought they were doing, inviting this guest in to help them survive and then it turns out that they in fact were butchered by the invitees. So, I think you can call it an invasion, especially when they did that to the government that invited them in, I assume they got invited in, and then put in place another government that they, in fact, brought in themselves from the outside, even though it was an Afghan regime.

Q: Did you make contact with any of the other embassies to find out if they had any...?

TAYLOR: I think that first day, the 28th, I think we began as best we could to try to make contact with the Indians and the Pakistanis. Actually, most of them came by to see us. Everybody assumed that we knew everything. It turned out that that first day, and again as opposed to 1978, everybody started moving around that first day after the Soviet attack. You could drive back and forth, so Amstutz showed up, and we made contact with all of the staff. Then we began starting up normal operations and reporting back to Washington as to...well we just talked to the Pakistani political officer today and he thinks this or reported this and nobody was hurt in that embassy. Various things of this sort. So, within 24 hours we were in effect beginning to report all of the rumors that were going around.

For about three days the airport remained closed so nobody could come in. None of our personnel who were on leave could come back and there were no foreign journalists coming in. So, it was a fairly peaceful period for us. But, when the Kabul airport opened up, virtually all of our staff came back, but at the same time we had a second invasion consisting of foreign journalists, some of whom were well known and capable journalists, many of whom didn't know a thing about what was going on and didn't know much about anything as far as I could tell. Because of that and their insistence, and there were a couple of journalists who had international reputations, Armand DeBorchgrave was probably the most well known of all the journalists who came to Kabul for that initial period, we decided that we would have a briefing every afternoon at 4 or 5:00 or something like that and try as best we could to answer their questions and tell them what we thought was going on. That lasted for about a week when the attention span went on to something else. Most of them left after about a week and started writing about the next crisis some place. But, that is the way we handled it.

There was a lot of pressure because we had a very small staff and trying to do your own day-to-day business and then the care and feeding of these numbers of journalists, was a little bit difficult. But, we were up to about five or eight reporting officers from various agencies. The military attach# had come back and it was helpful to have him back and

running around town seeing what was happening and all. But, nothing further really happened. In many people's minds, including my own, I thought in those first few days that that was sort of the end of the story. Nobody is going to defeat the Soviet army, especially with all the force you could see on the streets and reports coming out that additional divisions had deployed throughout the western and southern parts of the country. I thought that was the end of the story. Obviously, for reasons that I mentioned earlier, the story went on for roughly ten years.

In terms of what happened afterwards, there was, of course, a great deal of bilateral US/ Soviet tension involved. President Carter made a somewhat unfortunate statement that he felt that this particular development betrayed his trust in the Soviet behavior and policy making. This didn't make him look very presidential, I think. Most people felt that he was surprised at this, and all of us were surprised, but we didn't say, “Gosh, how could you guys do this to me?” Well, at any rate, there was a lot of bilateral tension and a lot of regional tension. The Paks were alarmed and the Indians to some extent were alarmed but they had Pakistan as a buffer between them and the Soviets. There was a lot of speculation as to whether this meant an extension of the Brezhnev Doctrine to the entire world. Did this mean that the Soviets can deploy force whenever they feel they have the right to deploy force? There were a lot of security concerns in the region as well as in other areas.

Q: There was concern in Central America, too, as the Nicaraguan revolution had already taken place.

TAYLOR: So there were a lot of broader concerns other than just Afghanistan. Again, in the broadest possible sense, Afghanistan per se represented little of importance to the United States, but this particular development could have been viewed as a real factor in US security concerns not only in that region but in regions that were more of an immediate and strategic interest, such as the Middle East. Even though the Camp David Accords had

been implemented the year before, still there was the problem with the security concerns vis-a-vis Israel and Syria, etc.

So, that, I guess in a nutshell was the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.

Q: What about your relations with the new government? What did you do after the invasion?

TAYLOR: That is a good question, because it was never very clear in my mind what the policy was, but the official policy was that the issue of recognition did not arise. I don't know if this is a known story, but I drafted a report, a cable, and convinced Amstutz to sign off on it, recommending that we break relations, that we close the embassy and withdraw everybody out. There is no legitimacy to this regime and we should have nothing to do with it. It is nothing but an imposed puppet government, imposed by Soviet military force. He signed off on it. Washington didn't buy that, obviously. They didn't want to pursue that policy and we would remain as more or less a listening post...we were not much more than that even before the invasion. We did close down USIA operations, and most everything else. We brought out various people...the econ people, it didn't make much sense to have them there. One consular officer stayed for a while and then we had another officer doing consular work. So, we continued as a listening post. We took the position that we would not deal in any kind of political sense with the new regime. That we would deal with the new regime only on consular and security matters and in effect do the minimum amount of business with the new guys. Only what had to be done such as arranging for the shipment in of supplies for the embassy and asking them for an exit visa for people being transferred out and things of that sort, actually consular and administrative matters. There was never supposed to be any kind of political contact in the political sense.

Q: So, you never went to the Foreign Ministry or things like that?

TAYLOR: Only for reasons that I have just described.

Q: These were orders from Washington?

TAYLOR: Yes, that was Washington's decision as to the level and the nature of the relationship with the new regime.

Q: Carter had come out fairly strongly. I think he had put undue reliance on personal relations. That there was going to be a whole new ball game with the Soviet Union. If you were honest and above board with the Soviets they would respond in kind. Although he had a National Security Advisor who down to every toe nail detested the Russians per se in Brzezinski... What was your reaction to Carter's reactions that you were getting from news, etc.?

TAYLOR: Well, that is more or less related to what I said before. His initial reaction was that he felt betrayed. Yes, I think that was probably true. He probably really felt because of his confidence in his ability to deal and establish a personal relationship with someone like Brezhnev and the rest of the Soviet leadership and that they couldn't possibly do something that would be detrimental to that relationship. I think because of these statements and initial reaction a lot of people felt that he was unduly naive in thinking that this would play any role in reigning in Soviet tendencies for expansion. So, that was sort of the view of most people who followed these kinds of issues, that this naivete was too naive, if you will, and somehow Brzezinski had not been able to convince him that nations, especially somebody who was as hostile and expansionist as the Soviet Union would not take some actions just because somebody had led the President of the United States to believe they would behave in such a manner. They just viewed events in Afghanistan as far more important to the Soviet Union than they were to the United States and that they had on their borders the right to determine what happened in Afghanistan and play the dominant external role and if Washington didn't like it that was just too bad.

Q: What happened to your wife? Did she become a dependent spouse?

TAYLOR: Okay, what happened to my wife and me in the next few weeks. We went on doing these reporting jobs, etc. and about three or four weeks after the coup in late January, our CIA colleagues uncovered a report of unknown veracity and reliability and the source was not terribly solid, that the KGB had come in in full force and was working with the new Afghan security services and were targeting me personally and some kind of unknown operation and that they were intending to create some kind of situation involving me in a security sense. Now, this was reported back to Washington and the Department and Amstutz asked me whether I wanted to leave or whether I wanted to stay. The end of our tour was coming up that spring and I thought I had a lot of institutional memory as to what had happened in Afghanistan during these years and didn't think the report was terribly reliable, so I said I was willing to stay. Washington then came back and said no, no, no. This was 1980 and we had the hostages right next door in Iran, they had been taken in November, 1979 and Washington didn't want any further security problems, I assume. It was never explained, but you salute and do what you are told. So, I got instructions to get on the next plane, regardless where it was going. Orders would be cut later concerning my next assignment, etc..

So, about two days later, air connections were still fairly unreliable, I got on a plane to New Delhi and had to leave without packing up, just carrying a suitcase. So, I was in New Delhi for a few days and then was told to go on back to Washington, that I would find a job somewhere there. The decision had been made to close the USIS operations so my wife stayed on another month, I think, to finish up all of the administrative business having to do with just closing up...terminating employees and transferring somehow all of the responsibility of the USIS buildings and equipment and things to the admin section remaining in the embassy. So, she was able to get out and come back to Washington as well in about April. So, we ended up in Washington after that.

Q: This was April, 1980?

TAYLOR: Right.

Q: So, what happened when you got back to Washington? It was still NEA wasn't it?

TAYLOR: Yes.

Q: How did you find things within the NEA Bureau and all that? Was there much interest in what you had seen and your knowledge of this and how did you find the Bureau looking at this situation?

TAYLOR: Well, it is odd that you should ask that question because as it turned out nobody had any interest in talking to me at all.

Q: I have to say that this happens in the Department again and again and again which is why I asked the question.

TAYLOR: Well, they offered me a job in the Office of Regional Affairs doing something that they would create. They didn't have a particular slot for me or a portfolio of particular issues that they wanted me to work on. Nobody mentioned a job working on Afghan affairs or anything, really. There was no debriefing. It was kind of strange. I thought that people coming back from a place like that would presumably be of interest to at least the desk officer, but it didn't happen. If I may add a personal opinion, I have gained the impression over 25 years of Foreign Service work that the incumbents in any particular job consider themselves to be the expert on whatever that particular portfolio is and somebody who is no longer in a particular job of responsibility on that portfolio is of little interest to him.

I recall a conversation that I had with Ambassador Ted Eliot at the time of the funeral of Spike Dubs. Eliot, of course, was a pallbearer as I was. After the funeral I said to him, “Given these events and the murder of Spike Dubs and the growing relationship with the Soviets and all of these events, while here in town for this funeral I assume that you are going to be talked to by the people in the Department, having been the ambassador there

just before Spike Dubs." And he looked at me as if I was absolutely crazy and he said, "Nobody here wants to talk to me." He had been the ambassador there for a long time and you would think that in that context somebody would have wanted to ask what he thought about all of these events. He said nobody had asked him.

Q: I have tried to figure out this. All I can figure out is that we hire people on the policy side people who feel that the more a person knows about something the more inhibiting it is. It is a lot easier to come in with a blank slate and have your own perceptions rather than have somebody say, "Well, that was done before." It makes for a poorer decision making process, but within the thing it allows the hard charger to go ahead without the inhibitions and prior knowledge.

TAYLOR: That means a lot of wheels are being invented all of the time.

Q: Yes,

TAYLOR: This is one reason why I do this oral history way after the fact. Frankly I think they could do with a solid oral history of people coming out of trouble spots, just for this and have it within the system.

Q: Today is February 22, 1996. You came back from Afghanistan and would you talk a little about your reception there before you move in to what you did?

TAYLOR: Well, I came back from Afghanistan leaving abruptly towards the end of January, the early part of February of 1980 and therefore was off cycle in terms of the assignment process. But, when I got back I was offered a couple of jobs and one of them was as a senior watch officer in the Operations Center, which is the State Department's crisis management operation. In terms of Afghanistan and the interest of Department officials in what had happened there or in terms of people debriefing me there was absolutely none. I wasn't asked to talk to anybody in terms of what had happened in

Afghanistan and what my particular analysis was. That seems to be the norm in Foreign Service culture and I ran into it again several years later.

But in terms of the Operations Center I was a senior watch officer in charge of one of the five teams which mans this particular crisis center 24 hours a day, every day. It is a constant communications and alerting responsibility for whatever happens in the world during your 8 hour watch. There were five people on each team and you basically were responsible for making certain that senior people on the 7th floor from the Secretary to his several deputies to the regional bureaus, assistant secretaries and their staff assistants, were alerted as soon as possible when anything of real importance happened anywhere in the world, such as the Chinese invasion of Vietnam, which happened on one of my watches.

I did that particular job for 18 months...

Q: This is from when to when?

TAYLOR: This was from roughly February, 1980 to the summer of 1981. Eighteen months was the normal assignment there.

Q: You mention that the Chinese went to war with the Vietnamese. How did that play out?

TAYLOR: Well, oddly enough, this was a Chinese incursion across the border into Vietnam and I don't recall why they did it. The first indication that this had taken place came over an AP ticker, we had all the tickers, of course, operating in the Ops Center. We noticed this might be something telling people about, but let's try to confirm. So, as in a lot of cases, we immediately called up our embassy in Bangkok and talked to the political counselor and asked if he had anything on that. He hadn't even seen the ticker item, so we referred him to the item. He began calling around to see what was going on. Then we made the same kind of call to our embassy in Beijing, and they hadn't heard anything but were going to start trying to get some information if they could. Then we alerted, it was

in the middle of the night, a graveyard shift, the East Asia Bureau staff assistant at home and sort of read to him the AP report and told him what we had done in terms of the two principal embassies and then it was up to him to run with the ball at that point. We had alerted the Bureaus, we were getting information as best we could from the field, but I felt at that particular point until we got further concrete information from the field I didn't want to go around waking up senior people, under secretaries and people like that. But, if the Bureau staffer wanted to wake up any of his people in the Bureau he certainly could, that was his job to do that.

We continued to get further press reporting on this and then finally embassy Bangkok called back and said they had contacted the foreign ministry and there had been an incursion as far as they could tell up on the Chinese/Vietnamese border so they were going to push it as far as they could. Then they wanted us to what we call “patch” which means you do a telephonic conference call. We have the capability to connect various people, I think it was up to seven different parties could come through our communications center and be able to talk to each other. So we patched him to some one in the East Asia Bureau. It was our job to put these people in contact and they, as policy people, could decide what further action needed to be taken. Then that, in effect, was the end of our role. This is an example of the kind of thing that can happen.

Q: It shows the great development of this Operations Center, we are talking about 1980, which really came into real being after the Cuban missile crisis, didn't it?

TAYLOR: Yes.

Q: And found we were sort of lacking and putting things together bit by bit and as communications got better you were able to get people to chat away in real time on something.

TAYLOR: There was another responsibility that we had. For instance, in this particular case, after I had talked to the political counselor out in Bangkok who confirmed that this

had happened out there, at that point it was our job too, to just press a button which brought us into immediate contact with seven or eight other similar operations in other agencies around town, the White House, Pentagon, CIA, NSA and a couple of other agencies...and tell them in this context that we had been in contact with our embassy and the embassy reported that this did happen, so that these other agencies, who also had seen the AP report and possibly had been in touch with their counterparts out in the field, but I didn't know one way or another, and told them yes, we could confirm that. Then they would handle it within their agencies as they saw fit. So, information flow was pretty quick and pretty thorough. Even though it wasn't a whole lot of information necessarily in every particular crisis, the information we did have was disseminated pretty quickly around Washington so that the agencies with specific responsibilities and capabilities could follow up on it as they wanted.

Q: Were there any other particular events that you got involved in as the point man?

TAYLOR: Well, there was the famous rescue attempt back in April, 1980 when President Carter ordered a joint operation by the Pentagon to go into Tehran to attempt to rescue the hostages who had been taken in November, 1979. We all know it came to grief at what we call Desert One which was the initial rendezvous point for the forces coming by helicopter and by C-130 in different directions and they were supposed to rendezvous there and then go further into Tehran and make the attempted rescue. Well, at Desert One there was a collision between a C-130 and a helicopter which killed, I believe eight people, and caused the mission to be called off by the people back here in Washington. It was a pretty messed up plan and the execution wasn't terribly efficient or effective.

The reason I got involved in this and how the Operations Center functioned in this particular episode was that I arrived as usual around 11:15 at night to take over the graveyard shift that began at midnight. I noticed that there were an unusual number of cars in the Department's basement parking lot and more than an unusual number of lights on on the 7th floor where the leadership was. My predecessor, as he was briefing me before

he left didn't indicate that he knew of anything that was going on. He had noticed that some staffers were still around who normally aren't around that late, but he didn't have any information as to what might be going on. That is the way it stood until about 2:00 in the morning when one of the staffers for P, which is the Under Secretary for Political Affairs, the senior professional Foreign Service officer and our leadership in the Department, came down with several high precedence, highly classified cables to be sent out at a specific time. He said, “Do not send them before or after (whatever the time was, let's say 2:30).” So, I alerted the actual communicators, the guys who actually prepare and send these messages that we were going to be sending down some stuff right at 2:30 and they had to be on the wires right then, not before or after. What these were were cables to various embassies in countries through which we had staged this rescue attempt. Instructions for them to go in to their host government and explain what had happened. What had happened was explained in the outgoing cables and this, of course, was the first time I or any member of the team had been aware of what was actually going on. It was kind of a stunner to see that we had tried this and even more so that it had failed so completely in actually executing what the plan was.

In any event, we waited and sort of huddled, my little five man team, and briefed everybody on the sensitivity of all this involved and assumed that when word of it got out there would be tremendous media interest in what anybody in the government knew about all of this. But at the same time there would be tremendous interest within the government, within the executive branch, as to what actually happened and what was going to happen the next day or two when obviously President Carter and his colleagues would have to explain exactly what had happened and why it had failed so badly. So, we sent the messages out and there was only one fellow from the media, one White House correspondent, I believe, if I recall correctly it was ABC TV news, who detected a lot of bright lights on at the White House late at night as well. He stayed on the air throughout the night and would periodically break into the late night broadcasting which was pretty grim stuff. Nothing was happening he said, but it was obvious to him as an experienced

reporter that something was going on. There were too many cars coming and going, too many lights on, etc.

So, at about 5:00 it was announced from the White House that President Carter would come on the air at 7:00 in the morning and make a statement. About that time, once it had been announced that Carter was going to make a statement at 7:00 in the morning phone calls started lighting up everywhere in Washington including the State Department, White House and probably the Pentagon, too. But, that was when I decided to start alerting some of the people lower than the Department leadership because obviously the leadership knew what had happened. But, somehow, lower down in the various bureaus perhaps there were people who had not been privy to the planning and carrying out of this operation. It so happened that my wife who was in USIA was the country officer for Iran at the time so I called her and woke her up and told her that Carter was going to come on at 7:00 in the morning, that it included her area of interest, so she might be prepared to take all of that in, and might alert whoever she thought appropriate in USIA. Then I apologized for calling so early.

At any rate that was about all we had responsibility for at that point. When Carter came on at 7:00, I felt confident that everybody interested in Washington was watching and was up and around and aware of what was going to happen. He made a reasonably brief statement. I guess the idea was there would be lengthier briefings later in the day. So, essentially that was it for our watch. It was kind of an interesting watch. One of the most interesting I had during the entire 18 months I was there.

There were a lot of other various crisis in parts of the world. Somebody would die, for instance, a country's president would die of natural causes, or plane crash or a coup. Those kinds of things were the things we dealt with in the Ops Center. It was not an easy job, the worse part was the schedule. You rotated every two days changing your shift from 8:00 in the morning to 4:00 in the afternoon and then two days of 4:00 to midnight and then two days of the graveyard shift, midnight to 8:00 in the morning. So you were

constantly tired. It wasn't an easy job physically. There was a lot of dead time, of course. There aren't always crises, but when it does happen you have to be prepared to have this routine down of knowing who to alert, and when and how quickly and at the appropriate level. You don't wake up the Secretary every time.

There was a funny story, I mean, unusual, it was funny in retrospect but not terribly funny at the time. Toward the end of the tour, after the change in the administrations from Carter to Reagan, Al Haig had become Secretary of State. We have this system whereby the Secretary has this direct line by his bedside to me and the other senior watch officers right there at the Ops Center. He could pick it up and press the red button and it would immediately light up a red button on my console. Along about 4:00 in the morning one time there were horrendous thunder storms around the Washington area, so it was probably the spring of 1981. Mind you, I, under either Vance or Muskie, after Vance resigned, because of the Desert One operation, I might add, that line had never been used. We all knew it and were conscious of not touching it because if you punched the button it rang on his line too. That rainy morning about 5:00 in the morning, all of a sudden the red button lit up and it started ringing a special ring that it had so that you knew it was not just someone phoning in but the line at the Secretary's bedside. I said to myself, “Holy Christ, what is going on? There isn't any crisis that I know of.” So, according to the instructions I punched the button and picked it up and said, “Mr. Secretary?” Then there was a slight pause and he picked up on the other end. Obviously I had waked him, I could tell by the way he talked. He asked what I was calling for and I said, “Well, Mr. Secretary, the machine went off, I thought you were calling me.” Given Al Haig's reputation of being an ogre he took it quite well, he didn't really chew my head off. He said, “No, son, I didn't call you, you called me.” And I said, “Well, Mr. Secretary, I apologize, it must have been an equipment problem here. I apologize, there is no crisis.” He said, “Okay” and hung back up.

Then within ten seconds the thing went off again. I didn't answer it that time. I figured it just didn't make any sense having just talked to him and there wasn't any crisis. So, I let it ring for ten minutes or something like that, taking the chance that nothing had happened in the

last ten minutes that he wanted to talk about. Then it stopped. So, I had to write that up in the log we had to keep and make certain that my bosses knew perfectly well what time this had happened and that I had in fact waked up the Secretary of State and that if somebody got dumped on at the start of business I wanted to make certain that they knew why. My speculation was that there was simply a short in the system someplace caused by all the heavy rain.

But that was an unusual operation. Vance, I recall, in the early days when he was Secretary would not use that emergency line. He would call up around 6:30 or 7:00 every morning on the normal number we had in the Ops Center and say that he would want to talk to Hal Saunders, assistant secretary for NEA, or any of the other senior officers in the Department. He was the one who called most, I think. I don't recall Muskie ever calling early in the morning to be patched to any of the guys he wanted to talk to before they left for work. But Vance called 10 or 15 times during the two or three months I was there when he was in office. So, he liked to talk to people early in the morning.

Q: In an interview a long time ago, I can't remember who, but somebody said they woke the Secretary of State up because there had been a border dispute between, I think it was Venezuela and a bordering country, and the Secretary said, "Thank you very much for informing me, but where the hell is this?"

TAYLOR: My general approach on a lot of that was that unless it was absolutely mandatory not to go to the principal directly but to go to one of the major principal's staffers. Most of the time when I was a senior watch officer, Arnie Raphel, the former Ambassador to Pakistan, who was killed in a plane crash in Pakistan, but before that was a special assistant on the Iranian affairs and was working directly with Vance and Warren Christopher on the hostages. Anytime something on the hostages would come in I wouldn't go to either of the principals, I would go to Arnie, for instance, and wake him up. And that helped him any number of times. Statements from Khomeini would come out and we wouldn't know if they were new or what, it wasn't my job to be the expert on

substance. But you had to recognize when substance was important and possibly new, so you would let some of these staffers know and let them decide what to do with it. But, a border dispute, I am not sure...

Q: You left there when and where did you go?

TAYLOR: I finished the Ops Center job in the summer of 1981 and was back on the regular summer assignment cycle.

Q: I might add for someone reading this, often you mention being off cycle. The cycle is usually predicated around the summer, June or so, mainly because of schooling for children. So assignments usually would be made in the spring of a year so people could make and have their plans by the beginning of summer.

TAYLOR: What we call off cycle is any time the rest of the year. And clearly, fewer jobs become open during those nine months and so there is less movement of personnel.

So, back in the summer of 1981 I got back on the regular cycle and was looking around for a job in the normal way you do. You ask your colleagues and network a little bit to see what is open. The initial decision is overseas or Washington. Once you make that you are sort of locked into a particular bidding. I ended up in the Bureau of Political/Military Affairs (PM) in the office of Security Assistance and Arms Sales and had the portfolio for Egypt and Israel.

Q: Oh boy. That is THE portfolio. This is post Camp David.

TAYLOR: Yes, just a couple of years before in the Camp David agreement we had made a firm commitment to both Egypt and Israel to provide huge amounts of military assistance to each country, if you will, as a reward for signing these peace agreements. President Anwar Sadat, I think, was extremely clever in his negotiating policy because he came out of the Camp David Accord with a lot of cash and a lot of equipment. The policy, it was

clear to both sides, was that the level of equipment that we were willing to sell Israel was a notch above, qualitatively superior to the level of equipment that we were prepared to sell Egypt. Everybody understood that because our basic policy was not to arm one of Israel's possible foes in the Middle East so that it would endanger Israel's military security. And it was also clear that the amount of money involved was a bit less for Egypt than it was for Israel. So, that approach satisfied both the Israeli lobby here and the Israel government and it ended up that the levels were high enough that it meant a tremendous influx of both cash and equipment to Egypt. Unfortunately, as we all know, that particular Accord led to Sadat's assassination by some fundamentalist Egyptians who opposed the Camp David Accord, but in the broader sense it benefited Egypt to a tremendous degree.

Q: You had this job from when to when?

TAYLOR: I was in PM for three years. From the summer of 1981 to the summer of 1984.

Q: While you were dealing with this were you ever disturbed or were people around you disturbed about the amount of military stuff we were putting into a volatile region?

TAYLOR: Some people were. A lot of people questioned the wisdom of the scale and the scope of our policy and our willingness to arm these two particular countries to such a degree while at the same time the Soviets were arming Syria another potential, in fact, real opponent of Israel. Yes, this was debated any number of times. But the policy was so written in concrete, I guess you could say, that people who opposed it never really had a chance of prevailing over what the policy was. Obviously ACDA (Arms Control and Disarmament Agency) was the main proponent of the view to take a more careful look at this. ACDA was steam-rollered by every other agency in town. The policy was made at such a high level and Congress was behind it except for a few dissent voices. So, it was never questioned in any meaningful bureaucratic form.

Q: Had you taken over the job before the Israeli invasion of Lebanon?

TAYLOR: Yes. That occurred on my watch.

Q: Could you talk about that because I think there was some very serious questions at that time about what we were doing about it? And could you explain what this invasion was?

TAYLOR: The border of Israel and Lebanon at that time, this occurred back in 1982, was pretty much uncontrolled on the Lebanese side but highly controlled and manned on the Israeli side. So, opponents of Israel could filter down through reasonably sparsely populated areas of southern Lebanon and launch rockets over across the border and into Israel proper and hit some of the cities and kibbutz installations and other populated areas of northern Israel. This resulted in civilian deaths and injuries. It was a fairly constant and regular occurrence. Not only were the PLO and the Palestinians involved, but a lot of other crazy groups operating up there were involved.

To make a long story short, the Israelis in 1982 decided they had had enough of this and somehow somebody had to control that border from the other side. The Israelis could control their side, obviously, but they couldn't control the other side. So, they decided to invade Lebanon. The pros and cons of that decision have been debated for a long, long time. But they decided to invade Lebanon and clean up Lebanon, particularly the Palestinians, but anybody else who was identified as possibly supporting these kinds of operations, but the Palestinians and the PLO were the principal target of the Israeli Defense Forces. It was quite an easy military operation for them. They invaded them and went all the way to Beirut and stopped more or less in Beirut feeling that was as far as they needed to go.

This caused us considerable policy problems in terms of our identification as the principal supplier and supporter of the Israeli military and yet they had gone into Lebanon all the way to Beirut. We did, in fact, make any number of demarches, statements, pleas, to cease and desist, and stop and withdraw as soon as possible. All of the usual noises we would make in a situation like that. But, the Israelis were really quite hard nosed at the

time. Their Defense Minister, Ariel Sharon, was in charge of this particular policy and he was extremely hard line and still is, and rejected many of these attempts to convince him that he was pursuing a misguided policy.

There was the incident of the two refugee camps, Sabra and Shatila, which created a worldwide uproar and I think eventually produced enough outside pressure that the Israelis, themselves, recognized that they had to pull back, saving face as much as possible. The Sabra and Shatila massacres were, as best we can tell at this time, carried out not by Israelis but by Lebanese who were right wing Lebanese. They went into these camps...and there was evidence that the Israelis, themselves, perhaps had been responsible for working with these Lebanese in some particular fashion and so bore a certain amount of responsibility for the massacre, but in these two refugee camps hundreds if not thousands of Palestinian men, women and children were gunned down by these Lebanese. When that came to light, it really created tremendous strain in the bilateral relationship between the United States and Israel because, if I recall, the guys out at the embassy told me at the time, once I had arrived there on assignment, and they had reported all of this, that they had been deceived because they had been told by Sharon that the Israelis had no involvement and it wasn't their responsibility. They didn't know what was going on. When, in retrospect, after some of this information came out, that in fact the involvement was closer and more intimate. They didn't pull the triggers but they did have organizational responsibility to some degree. It was never quite clear to what degree. Sharon, himself, had not been honest with our senior officials at the embassy. So, that created a tremendous amount of tension.

Q: At the time the Israelis were accused of bombarding sort of indiscriminately villages and Beirut using cluster bombs and using both air and artillery and the equipment was obviously American that was doing this. From your perspective, did this raise any issues?

TAYLOR: Aside from policy issues, you mentioned cluster munitions. Cluster munitions are a bomb or an artillery round which contains smaller, what we call submunitions,

grenade type of explosives, which when they hit the target and break apart, these smaller munitions are scattered over a very large area and then they themselves explode creating a tremendous area of havoc when these munitions are used. In the arms sale agreement that we had with the Israelis, they undertook not to use these particular munitions, cluster munitions, in populated areas. They were to use them only against identified military targets, but not in populated areas. During the initial operations in Lebanon it became clear and the evidence was fairly compelling, that the Israelis had used these American supplied cluster munitions in populated civilian areas causing civilian casualties. This became a sore point for a long, long time. We immediately suspended the sale or shipment of any further cluster munitions to the Israelis. And that remained an issue for years. I had to deal with it when I went out to Tel Aviv. We didn't ship any cluster munitions for a number of years. I think they were finally released after I left in the later eighties.

Q: Where was the decision made not to ship?

TAYLOR: That had to have been made at the White House. Mind you, we had the problem of an ally invading a neutral country. We had the human rights considerations of not only the cluster munitions, but military operations in and around Beirut, a huge city which killed a lot of people. And then we had the very volatile issue of the Sabra and Shatila massacres. All of this was mixed into a stew in the summer of 1982 which caused all kinds of different problems. The White House and the senior leadership of both the Pentagon and the State Department were in constant contact on these because obviously there were tremendous domestic political implications and ramifications of every decision the American government makes vis-a-vis Tel Aviv. So the suspension of the shipment of cluster munitions, which was about the only concrete sanction that we took vis-a-vis the Israeli government as a result of the Lebanon invasion, was made at the White House. But it was supported by everybody, by the Pentagon and by State.

Q: Were you getting any static from Congress on this?

TAYLOR: American Israel Political Action Committee (AIPAC) is the institutional lobby for Israel in Washington. Even AIPAC realized that the outcry on a lot of it was so hostile that this particular suspension of cluster munitions, which one could point to as a violation of a written contract was so clear that the suspension of shipment and sale of these munitions was something that could not be really refuted by the Israelis. Although the position that they took was: well, these were not really solely civilian populated areas, there were military targets in the area and the bombs just went astray a little bit and how can you separate purely civilian and purely military targets anyway.

Q: Well, this in many ways represented a real turning point in American-Israeli relations. It had always been the brave Israelis up against horrendous odds, defending their country. I have gotten from interviews of people who served in Lebanon, absolute disgust at the actions of the Israeli military, indiscriminate bombing, indiscriminate artillery barrages, etc. and the Sabra/Shatila massacres. Were you getting any feeling about the Israeli military policy from people you were contacting, including from the Pentagon?

TAYLOR: Yes, that is a very good question. I think the traditional attitude of David vs Goliath really changed abruptly as a result of this and nobody could really make a compelling case that Israel was any longer the puny little kid on the beach with all these big bullies kicking sand in its face. It just wasn't the case. The Israeli military capability was so far superior to any of its potential adversaries that their actions were beginning to become a major issue in some discussions around Washington. I recall that during my three years working on these issues here in Washington that the people in the Pentagon were really sort of out in front on this opposition to further sales not only of size but the kind of equipment that they were requesting. It became sort of a tug of war in many instances between the Pentagon and State as to how forthcoming we should be. Generally speaking State was willing to be more agreeable to many of the Israeli requests for equipment and technology and things that were covered by the program. While the Pentagon was really quite reluctant to be as positive in answering many of these requests.

And, in many cases, these had to be decided, refereed by the White House. We would have to say to the White House, “We are so divided as to whether we should say yes or no to the Israelis on this particular (whatever it is) that you are going to have to decide taking into account the political reverberations that might occur here in the United States.” But I think that is an excellent point raised, that there was this sort of fundamental change in the view, within the US government, of the capabilities of the Israelis and their willingness and readiness to apply overwhelming force in instances that they decided their national security was being threatened.

Q: We are talking about the early Reagan days. He came out of the Hollywood atmosphere which was instinctively pro-Israeli and Israel was sort of a knight in shining armor or something and certainly President Reagan reflected this. How did you find the White House at this time? There was this change of attitude, did you find this in the White House too?

TAYLOR: No, I never detected it in the view expressed by any of the political leadership in the White House or any of the political members of the NSC. We dealt basically with the NSC, not with the political leadership in the White House. We would go through the NSC to kick anything up to the President for decision. And most of the guys at that time in my bureaucratic position as a member of the Political Military Bureau in the State Department I would deal with military guys working the Middle East issue over at the NSC, most of whom were colonels. We went through a series of National Security Advisors over there including Richard Allen and Judge Clark.

Back to your point as to whether there was a discernible shift in the White House's political membership view of Israel, no, I didn't detect that at all.

Q: Well, how did things usually work out? Did the Israelis usually end up getting what they wanted?

TAYLOR: The people they had working here at the Israeli embassy were very clever in knowing where to come in within the US government, where to initiate a request and at what level and how to go about playing the bureaucratic game of getting their request to the right people at the right time. Generally the State Department's view and the NEA Bureau in State was as you can imagine also subject to these rifts within the Bureau because it covered the Israeli desk as well as the neighboring countries. So, you would obviously get differing opinions and views and recommendations on how to deal with some of these kinds of things. So, sometimes NEA would be more willing to be positive to an Israeli response than the rest of the bureaucracy and sometimes they would be less willing, depending upon the issue. I found that the Political Military Bureau was essentially probably more willing to sell just about anything within reason to the Israelis. So, I found myself and up the chain of command within the Political Military Bureau sort of always being out in front on this willingness to say yes.

Q: Did you feel comfortable with this?

TAYLOR: I felt powerful because you had Congress and a domestic lobby and a White House political leadership all willing to be really forthcoming. So, in effect, you would be sitting there as a bureaucrat knowing that you had all of this muscle behind you. Some guys in NEA and some guys in the Pentagon and some guys in Treasury, really didn't have the wherewithal to oppose these decisions that we in PM were advocating.

I had mixed views as to that situation. I could understand the arguments against saying yes to some of the requests that we got and many of them were so outlandish that you wondered...well, you know the term chutzpah, the Israelis certainly had a lot of that in their willingness to come in and ask for this and that.

Q: What sort of things?

TAYLOR: They wanted top of the line aircraft and a lot of things I don't understand. Electronic capabilities that would give them a leg up on just about anybody. In effect, they want the equivalent of what our guys were flying. When they did ask for that kind of thing we could pretty much turn them down on basis of what we call “releasibility,” that we were not going to release the technology that is important to our guys flying in Europe and Asia, obviously with the Soviet Union in mind. But, then they would say, “Well, why not, it is not that much different. But if you can't give us top of the line, how about something just a little bit less?” Many times they would claim that they would accept that but our people, and a lot of us really got down into the technical fields where you would have to call generals and colonels who were fliers or electronic experts, to argue these releasibility questions in front of policy makers because the policy makers were not capable of answering any of these questions. Our guys were very concerned about what they called reverse engineering, that the Israelis being as highly skilled technicians as they are would take this less than top of the line equipment and then engineer it to the point where they could upgrade it themselves. They could figure out what we had left out and therefore get it up to where it was almost if not as good as what our guys were using. And that is what our people were afraid of, that they would be able to take our equipment and upgrade it to a point where it would be as good as ours. The concerns there were proliferation of technology in the sense of irresponsible Israeli behavior and that in some cases has been borne out. They have in fact released technology to other countries without our permission. And secondly was the concern that some of this might come down over Syria or Jordan or some place like that in a military operation either by accident or in combat and gotten into the hands of the Soviets. That was our adversary at the time and we were concerned.

So, there was a constant effort to stiff arm some of these more ridiculous claims. It also got into the issues of financing these billions of dollar a year. Every October 1, which is the beginning of the fiscal year, the Israeli embassy here would be on the doorstep and say, “Where is the check for three billion dollars?” or something like that. They wanted the

cash on the first day of the fiscal year whether or not they had contracts to be signed for the purchase for XYZ kinds of equipment.

Q: In a way these were essentially gifts from the United States weren't they?

TAYLOR: Yes, all grants that do not have to be repaid. They wanted that right away so that they could put it in the bank and start earning interest on it. Whereas our people insisted that the three billion dollars belonged to the US taxpayer and we would dispense it when we received a contract. We don't give you the 3 billion on the first day of the year because that costs us money because we have to pay the interest on that particular debt. We lost that one. I think that had been decided more or less just about at the time I arrived. A number of people, especially at the Treasury Department were terribly, terribly unhappy with that because they and OMB had to come up with ways to finance the cost of these funds when they knew very well they were not being used but sitting and earning interest for the Israeli government at the expense of the US government. So this is a little arcane issue.

Q: How did the Egyptians deal with their grant?

TAYLOR: The Egyptians realized they did not have the political clout on the financial side to do something like this. So, the Egyptians went through the regular process that everyone else in the world does. When they had a contract for 200 million dollars they would submit it through the appropriate bureaucratic process and would receive the 200 million to pay for whatever the goodies were they were buying. That is the way the whole thing operated.

If we could sort of address that issue of how the Israelis maneuvered within the government. They would come in to me, they would come in above me depending on what the request was. By that time, sort of later in my tenure in this job, they recognized that the Pentagon under Secretary Cap Weinberger was really probably the least amenable to their requests, so most of the time they wouldn't initiate requests for money or equipment

or whatever at the Pentagon. They would generally come in somewhere else in the government. I found that this was really frustrating personally because you never knew what was coming up. So, I said that we have got to organize ourselves better to regularize, standardize our response on an interagency basis just how to deal with these kinds of events.

So, I wrote a memo up through the State Department's chain of command recommending that we formalize the bilateral discussions of these kinds of requests rather than dealing with them on an individual basis throughout the year. That we establish some kind of formal basis that all of our guys from all of the agencies get together with the Israelis once a year...one year here and one year in Israel...and we go down the whole agenda. We don't say yes or no throughout the year, we do this on an annual basis. We sort of see what they are after, what their whole purchasing program is, what their infrastructure needs are, and all of the gobbledygook that the military uses in determining what the Israelis want and what they need and what they can afford within the budgetary limitations of our assistance program. During these meetings we tell them this will be approved to a certain degree, you can have this, you can't have this, etc., so that we don't get hammered on every individual issue whenever the Israelis decided they would do something. And this was finally approved, oddly enough. I must say this is the only time I ever had any responsibility for forming national policy, if you will, because it was approved by State and DOD which were the two major players in all of this, but also by Treasury and OMB and all the people interested in the money and blessed by the White House. So, we in effect set it up this way and it became known as the JSAP (Joint Security Assistance Program). I think the first session was held in 1983 and have become annual things. I assume it is still going on, I don't know.

Q: Did the Israelis object to this at first?

TAYLOR: No, they didn't. We sort of vetted it with them first and they thought it was a good idea because it gave them an opportunity to sort of hammer away in a very public forum.

I don't think they were aware that our major objective on the US side was to get this thing under control and to limit their maneuverability.

Q: Looking for weak links in the process.

TAYLOR: Exactly. So, they would each year be required to sit down at a big table and come face to face with the leadership of the US delegation and be told at a very high level yes or no on most of these issues and what we could do and what we would not do. So these became annual affairs either here or in Israel.

When I was subsequently in 1984 assigned to the embassy in Tel Aviv as the political military officer, that was one of my annual jobs to coordinate all of this in Israel or come back here and represent our embassy in Tel Aviv in the discussions back here. But the decisions were handled at a very high level.

Q: While you were working on this, did the matter of Israeli intelligence, basically spying activities come up as a concern in dealing with American secrets, etc.?

TAYLOR: No, not in the sense of spying.

Q: Had the Pollard case come up?

TAYLOR: That broke in 1986, I think, while I was out in Tel Aviv.

What the people over in the Pentagon and in the various armed services, ours, were concerned about was releasing technology, just sort of giving it away. They weren't concerned about intelligence in the sense of them seeking through clandestine means to gain access to this technology. I didn't think that was the case.

Q: I might mention that Pollard was in Naval Intelligence and was Jewish and gave lots, and I mean lots of information straight to the Israelis. He was convicted of espionage

and is still in jail. But it is a case that the Israelis and many Jewish organizations bring up...please let our guy go...but we have been rather adamant on not doing that, up to now.

TAYLOR: Yes. He was sentenced to life imprisonment as a result and it is raised every time there is a high level meeting.

Q: Yes, he was just granted Israeli citizenship as a gimmick to maybe get him out.

TAYLOR: I believe Cap Weinberger's statement regarding the extent of the damage that Pollard did through his espionage was probably the most telling testimony, at least that is what I have been told, and I have read a number of articles about the case. No subsequent President has been willing to release Pollard.

But I was going to mention another sensitive issue, not on the clandestine espionage front, and Pollard was controlled here by people at the Israeli embassy, we know that, but there is a concern in some quarters that they do not need to mount clandestine operations because they have access to a lot of sensitive information through people who are willing to hand it to them. American officials who are willing to simply disclose that. Much of this concern has to do with members of Congress and staff members in Congress who are given certain information by the Executive Branch and then it immediately ends up in the hands of the Israeli government. There have been incidents that have been proved in that regard, but what can you do. In many cases people in the Executive Branch have actually said that they will not say certain things in the presence of certain people because they are afraid that will immediately end up in the hands of the Israelis. That is a view held by a lot of people with whom I have had contact.

Q: In dealing with Israel sort of a background to this has always been one, the accusation that anybody who is opposed to Israel or is not particular for anything for Israel is anti-Semitic, plus the fact that those who are not Jewish but look upon Israel as being a foreign power not necessarily always our stalwart ally go through a certain examination tool...am I doing this because I am anti-Jewish. At the same time there has been a suspicion that

somebody is Jewish might through dual allegiance be giving things to the Israelis. You get other cases, you mentioned Casper Weinberger, who is Jewish(?), but not a friend of Israel in a sense. It is a mixed thing. Did you go through some the soul searching and feeling on this thing?

TAYLOR: Oh, yes. That is a good point. It is one that anyone who is dealing with the issue has to face because you are in fact many, many times openly accused of being anti-Semitic if you express the view that is anti-Israel, if you will, whether that be policy or whether that be social behavior or just about anything. Many people take the view that you are either ignorant or don't understand the issues or are anti-Semitic. Those would be the only two valid reasons. That is emotionally difficult to deal with, being accused of those two things, especially when you, yourself, believe your own thought processes and analysis lead you to the conclusion that this is wrong on whatever issue you might be discussing.

If I could raise a point that years ago, and I think when I came in, the Department's personnel policy was that they would not assign American Jewish FSOs to Israel because of concerns that touch on the dual loyalty kind of thing. I don't know when that policy changed, but it certainly has changed now. We had any number of Jewish officers in Tel Aviv and in Jerusalem. That, I guess, has been a major change in our policy. And it resulted in having people there who spoke Hebrew, because they had learned it in their childhood and education process, spoke Hebrew very well and understood the society very well and could relate to the Israelis in a way that those of us who were not Jewish couldn't necessarily relate. That could lead to that statement of, “Well, you just don't understand this society.” But, that also raises the point again of dual loyalty and I am not in a position to comment on any individual with whom I worked or dealt who might have had more commitment to Israel than perhaps is healthy for a professional approach. I tend to think there were a few individuals who I met who held those kinds of views to perhaps a unhealthy degree. Not only for foreigners but for the Israelis themselves. We had some of our Israeli best friends who would say, “You gotta get out of this country every three months. The pressure, the stress and the pace is just too much.” So, they would go to

Rome or Paris or some place like that just to get out. It is a real pressure cooker, the society, it is such a small country. The population is concentrated basically in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, that particular corridor, and it is like the old experiment by just adding more and more white mice to a container, everybody just gets frantic. It is a very difficult place, so intense and everybody is seemingly so interested in what is going on in Israel, especially back in Washington on the political scene and the security scene...is there going to be another Middle East war tomorrow or tonight? So it is a very, very difficult place to serve and to live. Just getting things done is difficult. Public behavior is less than relaxing I would say.

Q: Who were your bosses in Political Military Affairs?

TAYLOR: The first director of PM was Richard Burt, who was a journalist before, not a professional FSO, and after PM became Ambassador to Germany. I don't know what he is doing now. His successor was Jonathan Howe, who was a Navy Rear Admiral, a two star admiral, who eventually became a four star admiral and was director of our intervention into Somalia in 1992. Apparently that operation didn't go very well in retrospect. I don't know who was responsible for it, but it got off track. People looking back on it said we intervened in Somalia on humanitarian grounds, to bring food and assistance to stop the starvation, and that went well, but then when we created the nation building stage we became responsible for security and started chasing Aideed around Mogadishu and couldn't catch him, that was when the mission got off track and we lost it. I can see John Howe's fingerprints all over that. He was such an ambitious fellow that he wouldn't accept just a humanitarian role. He would have to have something bigger.

Q: How about Richard Burt? How would you assess him at that time?

TAYLOR: He was a good Washington player in the sense of having contacts a lot of different places. He was there less than a year when I was there. We overlapped less than a year. I didn't have a great feel for Burt as opposed to Howe in terms of what he

might think or might do in a different job. He was more interested in sort of the Washington bureaucratic play or game than I think others were.

Arnie Raphel, I mentioned, became one of the senior deputies to Howe, and from there went to be Ambassador to Pakistan.

Q: Was there any concern in the Bureau, obviously you had the lion share, your portfolio, but was there any concern in the Bureau about giving arms to other countries, Latin America or anywhere else, giving out things that killed people while the State Department is trying to preserve peace?

TAYLOR: An interesting observation that I came away with was that people who want to be and are assigned to PM in the Department can be by and large very aggressive, sort of hard charging sort of people and they want to put PM on the map and get the PM view in front of the leadership of the Department, and argue this and argue that. They like to, like the Pentagon would say, lean forward in the foxhole all of the time. Concerns about injecting American arms into places of potential violence are not the kinds of concerns that are in the character of people like that. That is for the wimps in ACDA and humanitarians in the Human Rights Bureau. That is not our job, our job is to sell.

Q: Did you feel that way?

TAYLOR: No, I didn't. I knew it was our policy to sell and obviously since I had that portfolio and I found it an interesting one, and would express reservations when I thought it appropriate, I knew that it was not going to be received very well by the institution, PM. They just didn't like that kind of thing.

I might add that the staffing of PM is dominated by outside appointees, not FSOs. FSOs are in a minority, at least they were during my tenure there. Most of the staffing is people brought in from academia, journalism, or from the think tanks around town or something like that. And your point about concerns of injecting arms into sensitive areas, something

that most FSOs at least would think about, at least it would occur to them that this is a concern that we should examine, but it wasn't of primary importance. We were trying to be out in front and generally speaking were out in front of a lot of questions like that. You must keep in mind that this was the period of the growing involvement in El Salvador and Central America and nobody in PM ever expressed concern about shipping arms to Central America because obviously that is what Reagan wanted and what our policy was going to be and it just didn't make any sense to oppose it.

Q: You left there when?

TAYLOR: In the summer of 1984.

Q: And went where?

TAYLOR: To Tel Aviv.

Q: Was this just a natural outflow assignment?

TAYLOR: Yes, I think it fit in pretty well with what I had been doing in PM and in State for three years and it was time to go overseas again. I knew the job was coming open, so I bid for it. Apparently it was a very popular job at the time, a very interesting kind of thing. It was one of the few times I ever asked anyone to put in a good word for me. I asked Arnie Raphel to call Sam Lewis, our ambassador in Tel Aviv, and put in a good word for me. So, it worked out and I was given the assignment.

Q: Did your wife have a tandem assignment?

TAYLOR: That was the first time she had to take leave without pay which she did for the first year. She had been to Israel before on a field trip from Afghanistan to visit the American Center and see how the operations there were going, and was so excited about it because she thought it was a place worth visiting. It was new to us, we hadn't been there before. But, there was no job until the following spring when something came open. That

was the first time we had to take a break in service as a tandem couple. We had been treated pretty well by the personnel departments of both agencies.

So, I got there and didn't have any overlap with my predecessors, and found out that one of the major elements of my work was Lebanon. I had all of the political/military duties and liaising with the IDF. Fortunately the IDF headquarters is in Tel Aviv, whereas the Foreign Ministry is up in Jerusalem with all the other ministries. So, the other guys in the political section who dealt mostly with the Foreign Ministry had to make that drive back and forth to Jerusalem all the time. This had been done because of security concerns. The Israelis wanted to put the IDF as far from the borders as possible and put them in Tel Aviv rather than up in Jerusalem.

Q: You were in Tel Aviv from when to when?

TAYLOR: From 1984-88, four years in that job in Tel Aviv.

On the Lebanon front, which we discussed earlier from the Washington point of view, the policy and operation was being controlled by the IDF in Tel Aviv and not by the Foreign Ministry, so it became with my particular portfolio a natural to handle that, because the Israeli liaison office, vis-a-vis Lebanon, was housed in the IDF headquarters in Tel Aviv. The senior Israeli there was a fellow by the name of Uri Lubrani, who was in the Foreign Ministry most of his career but then went over to the MOD, Ministry of Defense, to handle the Lebanon policy questions. I have seen him on television a couple of times recently as sort of the main representative in negotiations with the other countries in terms of the peace process. At least he was for a couple of years back in the early nineties.

So, we would go over any time anything came up on Lebanon or we just wanted to hear the Israeli explanation of their policy and what was going on in Lebanon. Usually, the political counselor and I would go over to his office and have him talk for an hour or so and I would write up a reporting cable and send it off to the region and the Department.

You mentioned earlier the question of whether there was hostility from our colleagues around the region. At one point, I forget exactly when, I was back here or something, I heard guys in our embassy in Beirut were constantly incensed when they would get a reporting cable of our meetings with Lubrani and his explanations of why IDF was in Lebanon and IDF support for what they called the Army of South Lebanon, which was a force created by the Israelis of former Lebanese military or militia. It was an Israeli supported and supplied organization that was to control what they considered a security zone, about 20 kilometers north of the Lebanese/Israeli border. This particular army would be responsible for maintaining security and preventing rocket firings and infiltration and things like that. We would report this stating this is what the Israelis are doing and this is what they are saying their policy is. Our colleagues in Beirut were constantly incensed by these reporting cables on the grounds that we, the American embassy in Tel Aviv, should be pounding the table telling them to do this and to do that. I could never figure out why they would get emotionally angry at us because obviously we are not going to have any influence at all in Israeli's policy in Lebanon. We could make demarches at any particular level, but they knew what our policy was and for us to tell Lubrani that he should rein in the IDF would have been totally fruitless. He wouldn't have thrown us out of the office, he was too polite to do that.

Some of the more interesting reports were when Lubrani and his small entourage, there were only two guys in the office, would have come back from a trip up to Lebanon and South Lebanon and actually gone in and talked to people. If we happened to get lucky and time our request to visit him for a read out soon after his return from such a trip, that was when the visits were the most useful and the most interesting.

Q: I take it you were not allowed to go into Lebanon?

TAYLOR: No.

One particular funny story. When Ambassador Lewis left and Ambassador Pickering took over in 1986, he, of course, requested an IDF orientation tour of some of their bases in the south, in the Sinai and the West Bank and eventually up north. They agreed they would do all this, they were quite happy to fly him up in a helicopter and show him this and that. So, on one of these trips to the north, the Defense Attach# and I went along because we knew all of the guys on the Israeli side, and landed at a base here, had lunch there, got briefings, got to look in the helicopter at all the topography, flying over the Golan Heights and shown why they were such a strategic concern. At one point we landed very near a kibbutz which I knew was right on the border with Lebanon. We all piled into some jeeps and other kinds of trucks and started heading north. They wanted to show us a fire base that they had established up north to operate against the terrorists. It was a fire base as well as an electronic monitoring unit used to monitor the border fence against infiltrators. Well, we went through the border fence on the ground to get to this place and it was obvious that we were in Lebanon. I am paraphrasing it now, but it was very funny. Pickering said to his host at that particular point, “I won't even ask where we are.” And, they all laughed because they knew we were not supposed to be in Lebanon. Pickering didn't seem to care very much, he was such a hard charging guy he wanted to see this damn post. He wanted to get educated, so we just went on up.

No, but officially we were not supposed to be there. That was the job of our guys in Beirut, but they, of course, would not come down to the area controlled by the Israelis or the puppet army of Lebanese created by the Israelis.

Q: Sam Lewis was there for the first two years?

TAYLOR: I think for only one year until 1985 and then I had three years under Pickering.

Q: How did you find Sam Lewis as far as how he dealt with things? He had been there a very long time.

TAYLOR: He was there eight years all together, an extremely long time.

Q: What was the feeling you had gathered? Had he gone native?

TAYLOR: First of all he was extremely knowledgeable about Israel, the affairs of Israel and what had happened in the peace process of Camp David, which was a long and detailed negotiation. He had an institutional memory that was extremely valuable and knew the society, knew people in every segment of society. When my wife eventually became a cultural attach#, he knew a lot of people in that field. He knew a lot of the generals in my field and especially the politicians. His real strength, I think, was his contacts and his knowledge of the political workings of the Knesset and all of the myriad political parties they have. One guy could become a political party. He had developed a whole network of contacts and was extremely good at it. I, by no means, had the impression that he had gone native. I found him willing to say that some of these people are just so loony that they have no concept of what it is to be a sophisticated political leader, that they, for example, were so obsessed with keeping every inch of conquered territory from the 1967 war that they wouldn't listen to reason, couldn't place anything above the interest of keeping that land, etc. I would not consider his being pro-Israel in any sense of being unbalanced in his view. In fact, as I said, I heard him make any number of presentations where he was critical of the Israeli policy because they were this, or that. He was not an easy guy to work for. He was a crusty guy who knew what he wanted and was determined to get it out of the staff and could be very demanding on many occasions. He had tremendous contacts with Members of Congress because the visits by CODELS (Congressional visits) added to the work load to an inordinate degree. They were constantly coming and in 95 percent of the cases political officers were made control officers for these CODELS. Once in a while a econ officer would get one because the interest might be finance or trade.

We would also have Executive Branch visits dealing with negotiations of various kinds. But, I think Sam Lewis had contacts that went back so far and so deep that he was really an asset to the US government.

Q: How about Tom Pickering?

TAYLOR: Well, he is obviously one of the most successful Foreign Service Officers in history. I think he went from being a JOT to being an ambassador because he has been ambassador six or eight times, or something like that, and the guy is not that old. So, he had to start a long time back. He is a brilliant guy and has a brilliant mind. He seems to be an absolute sponge on information and just soaks it up on whatever the issue is and has an energy level that really is remarkable. He was known to get up about 5:00 and start Hebrew lessons at 6:00, or something like that. He would be at the embassy by 7:30 or 8:00. Be up in Jerusalem for a meeting at 8:00, breakfast with so and so. That became a favorite tool for everybody in the embassy. If your schedule permitted you would have breakfast in one of the hotels and write up your report sometime during the day. But he would do that. It became obvious that he over scheduled himself. He would have a daily schedule down to a 15 minute meeting here and a 20 minute meeting up there and would be up and back throughout the day, with dinner at such and such a place and coffee and dessert, etc. This would go on day, after day, after day. He was what we would call a type A personality.

But, by and large, as far as I could tell, his operating technique was to reserve a few major issues for himself and delegate virtually everything else to the DCM and the counselors of the various sections. He did not need to sign off on a lot of reporting cables which I thought were policy oriented reporting cables or analyses of certain issues. Some of these reports we included in the so-called Post Reporting Plan, your annual plan for the embassy reporting, so these were think pieces. He didn't have to sign off on those. I think he is the first ambassador that I ever met who didn't insist that all of these analytical kinds of policy oriented reports had to go through him. He delegated a lot. According to the

political counselor who I worked for for two years, Roger Harrison, who eventually became Ambassador to Jordan...one day we were going through some of this feedback from the front office and Pickering had written something on one of these think pieces like “Good show” or “Nice job.” Harrison said, “God, that is the first time I have seen anything like that in months.” So, I guess, the feedback from Pickering to his senior staff was limited. He would have his daily staff meetings, but in many cases wouldn't attend them. He would ask the DCM to take care of them.

Q: Who was the DCM?

TAYLOR: There were two in my four years. Bob Flatin was the first one, who became Ambassador to Burundi, I think. Art Hughes was the second one, and I think he is still active. He became Ambassador to Yemen.

So, that was Pickering's style. There wasn't a whole lot of interplay between Pickering and the members of the staff, unless you were dealing with him on a schedule for a CODEL or something like that. He used you for specific missions, if you will, but on a day-to-day basis I could go for a week or two without ever having an exchange with him on anything. I detected he spent a lot of time on those issues that he felt were important to him in his particular portfolio and left a lot of the other kind of reporting to the section chiefs. But, he is a remarkable person and I think obviously the Foreign Service has recognized that given his meteoric career.

Q: You mentioned that the political officers, which you were one, dealt the Congressional visit a lot. Could you tell me what you impression was of the average Congressional delegation?

TAYLOR: First of all, as I said, there were so many of them. It was a dreadfully difficult workload to add that responsibility to what we were doing normally at a busy embassy like that. They would either be one person or a CODEL of 20. Senators usually came two or three and Congressman in much larger groups. I think I must have met 30 to 40 senators

alone in that four year period and even more House members. They would be coming and asking very much the same questions. In most cases I felt they were not there on any real fact finding mission. They were there basically for domestic political reasons. They had to be seen visiting Israel because their particular constituency had a large Jewish vote. There was nothing unusual in that, it just happened to be that there were so many of them that felt that need to come out there.

One of the most notorious is Representative Charlie Wilson from Texas who probably doesn't have very many Jewish votes in his district, but he was notorious in the sense that he had girlfriends in Israel that he wanted to see. Of course, when he came it made it an easy CODEL because all you did was meet him at the airport with a car and a driver and he would take off to his various girlfriends. There would be no program. Then he would contact us when he was scheduled to depart to make sure he had the VIP treatment on his departure. Charlie Wilson was a real character. He is retiring now.

My overall impression of our Congressional leadership in Washington is not a very high one. There were members who were very, very shallow in their intellect and character and not too terribly deep in what they were thinking about most of the time. There were just a few who, in my opinion, really could be called exceptional individuals or political leaders. That is just a few, not very many. The Senators seemed to be more self-absorbed than the House members. I suppose that is because they considered themselves a member of an exclusive club. The extent of the arrogance toward control officers like me and other members of the embassy staff varied, but by and large it was fairly high. They considered us nothing but bag carriers and in many cases were extremely rude to me, and in exchanging notes with my other colleagues, it was not directed to me exclusively, it was the way they treated everybody. And on a couple of occasions I saw that treatment given to Tom Pickering, which I thought was, you know, he was a fairly senior guy, and for a Senator, no matter how high he might be...I mean, this is our representative to this country

and he shouldn't be treated like they do me and my colleagues. But, Pickering on these occasions didn't react the way I felt he could have reacted given his particular status.

But, I would say the responsibility for handling CODELs was probably the worst aspect of that assignment to Tel Aviv. If we could have gotten rid of that it would have made the four years a much more pleasant stay. But, that is a fact of life. In the press recently there was a story about Senator Arlen Specter going out there and insisting on this and insisting on that and the infamous story of getting a squash partner and a place to play up in Jerusalem while he was there. I had Specter and that is exactly what he asked me to do, and, of course, I did it. Nothing changes.

One Senator from the State of Washington probably made the most positive impression as a human being and who didn't know the region very well, he was a first term Senator, and he wanted to learn about the area. So he had a broad program of various ministers to meet to get briefed and with some of the politicians up in the Knesset. He was serious minded. A very nice guy. He was all by himself except for a couple of staffers, so he didn't have any Senatorial colleagues with him and would listen when I gave him a briefing on who he was going to meet and what the issues would be, and maybe you would like to ask a couple of questions on this, that kind of approach. He resigned after one term. He said the Senate and Capitol Hill was a snake pit and he didn't want anything to do with it. So, I guess he was too nice. That was too bad, I thought we lost a good politician.

Q: What was your impression of the Israeli military officer corps? You were dealing with generals, etc.

TAYLOR: Extremely motivated. They sacrifice a lot by choosing to make the military a career. The pay is dreadful, very, very limited pay. Housing facilities are not very good. Everybody has to do military service at the age of 18. It is a universal approach. They stay three years and then at the end of this time you can get out and then you are a reservist until the age of 45 and yearly have to do a month's active service. That is a tremendous

strain on the society to have to uproot everybody for an entire month every year. It costs that economy and society a great deal. Then, if you decide early on that you want to stay and become an officer and make it a career, then you know what sacrifices you are going to have to make. But, they are very highly motivated and highly skilled.

The elite, the cream of the entire IDF and the society as a whole, are your fighter pilots. Those are the guys who are the best trained, the best skilled and the most highly sought after guys to become fighter pilots. If you can become a fighter pilot, in the Israeli society you are on a higher plane, just above everybody else. That is more or less true of the Air Force in general. The Air Force is a very small organization, very elite minded and very highly motivated. So, even if you can't become a fighter pilot, if you can become a pilot of any kind that puts you in a category of its own. Then, further down the prestige ranks are your electronic people and other kinds of highly trained technicians in the Air Force. So, becoming the commander of the Israeli Air Force is quite an accomplishment for anyone. The ones I met and dealt with were really quite impressive guys. They were pilots early in their career and now at 45 or so were the commanders.

The ground forces are much, much larger and they have a lot of armored units and probably in the Western sense, I have heard this from our attach# guys, they are top heavy in terms of armor, but they feel that is the one way they maximize their limited man power by trying to maximize the firing power of each individual. So the armored units within the ground units are elites and they pick the best people coming out of the draft and assign them to the armored units.

And then you get further down, the artillery, that is a little less skilled. The infantry is probably the least skilled, and then you have your support units, usually staffed by your draftees. The Air Force is totally career, you have to enlist in it. The conscripts all go to the army.

Third on the list is the Navy which is extremely small, just a coastal patrol responsibility, and that, again, is a volunteer force, an all career force. If you go into the Navy that means you want to be in the Navy and make it a career. But, it doesn't have much clout politically, and doesn't get much of the Israeli budget and is constantly scraping for money. Naval installations are pretty poor in places. They don't even have a red carpet to give red carpet treatment for visitors, etc. It is kind of the runt of the litter, I would say. The guys in it are quite happy moving up and down the coast in their small patrol boats. They would come along beaches around Tel Aviv once in a while and you could see the guys with the binoculars looking at the girls on the beaches.

Q: Were you getting any impression from the military and the civilian population about Sharon and his reputation at the time you were there?

TAYLOR: By the time I got there he had resigned from the Ministry of Defense under real pressure because he was the one who was considered the architect of the Lebanon adventure and that had gone sour in so many ways that he had been sort of forced out. Begin had resigned in 1982 and Yitzhak Shamir had taken over and there had been elections just before I got there in 1984. It wasn't a majority for either the conservatives or labor party, so they formed a joint government called the National Unity government. Sharon was not in it. He had won a seat in the Knesset but he was not a member of that particular first government. He did eventually become a minister when the prime ministership switched from Peres to Shamir.

I remember taking a CODEL to meet Sharon. I think he was one of the minor ministers, minister of health, or something like that, but was no longer involved in the security forces, other than the fact that he was a former minister of defense and therefore had influence in the private circles of the government. The general view of him was that he was extremely right wing and very hard nosed, bull headed, if you will, individual and was, in effect, a real menace to any thoughts of negotiating peace of any kind. He became one of the leaders of the very right wing anti-negotiation bloc within the Knesset. Most of the people I knew

and who were willing...well all of the civilians were willing to talk politics all of the time constantly, the military wouldn't participate in political discussions unless you got to be a very good friend...therefore, the ones we tended to gravitate towards were members of the middle or leftist liberal kind of viewpoint, and they thought he was a very danger and had very little respect for him. They thought, obviously that he was a hero in 1967 and 1973, in those two wars, but they blamed him personally for a lot of the problems caused by the Lebanon thing and there were still casualties, every week more and more casualties from the Lebanese adventure. So, the people I knew best didn't have a lot of regard for him, but they knew that he had a lot of influence in the Knesset and that he might be able to exert that influence at some point. I guess he has been eclipsed by Benjamin Netanyahu, the current leader of the opposition. I don't know what happened to Sharon, maybe he is just too old and they want to move along to another generation of leadership.

Q: You talked before about the pressures of living in Israel, can you talk a little about the social side for you and your wife of being American representatives in this highly political, highly charged small town?

TAYLOR: Well, in the general sense social life was extremely busy. The Israelis loved to go to parties all the time...well, not just parties, but to go places and stop by and visit, go to theaters, etc. So, there was constant contact with Israelis willing to talk. A reticent Israeli is an oxymoron. They are certainly willing to offer their views, opinions and prejudices, if you will, at all times. So, we had invitations four or five times a week. A night out was the norm, except Friday night, of course, when all entertaining closed down. Although, some of our really liberal friends would be willing to come over on a Friday night without any problem.

Q: Did you find that you had to get out of the country, too?

TAYLOR: We would have liked to more than we did, but nobody in the embassy could get away as frequently as every three months. But, yes, by the time seven or eight months rolled around you were in such a frazzled state that you had to go somewhere to

depressurize. TWA served Tel Aviv and we had an Israeli local employee who was sort of the liaison at the airport, the guy who met and greeted and made arrival plans for various people. He was so good at his job and had such good relations with the TWA people that whenever an embassy person would be traveling to Europe or to the United States, you would probably get first class all the way. The lowest you would go would be business class.

We made it to France a number of times and back to the States as much as we could to get out and enjoy what we could outside the region. But, yes, it would have been nice to do it more often, but we couldn't.

Q: Before we leave Israel, were there any major events during the time you were there that might be worth talking about?

TAYLOR: I also had the terrorism portfolio. You may recall there were a couple of hijackings, one in 1985, the hijacking of a TWA plane in Beirut and the Achille Lauro happened during my watch too. It was hijacked by Palestinians and they killed an American citizen, Leon Klinghoffer, executing him for just being Jewish. That was floating off the coast of Israel at the time and finally put into Egypt and that was the famous incident when they were being flown from Egypt to, I think, Libya and our guys intercepted them in the air and forced the plane to land in Sicily. That operation was a good one.

The Israelis, although they never did admit it, mounted one of their famous raids on Palestinian headquarters in Tunis during the time I was there by ship, by one of their fast patrol ships. They took a commando team all the way from Israel to the Tunisian coast after dark. The team made its way to the residence of the PLO leader who was suspected by the Israelis to be responsible for some terrorist incidents against Israelis. They got into his house and killed him and a couple of other household members and got back out and all the way home before anybody suspected what they were doing.

You asked my assessment of the Israeli IDF capability, I think they can do those kind of things very, very well. Sometimes they don't think through the potential political ramifications of some of their security operations, but they can do it. If they are given orders to do something like that, they can do it.I mentioned Uri Lubrani earlier, he had a funny story. He must be 65 years old now. This had to do with the famous rescue in Entebbe, Uganda of hostages back in 1976. He said, even at that point he was too old to get into this commando business, but he had been stationed in Uganda for a number of years, not as an ambassador but as their head of the mission, they didn't have an embassy there. He knew the area and certainly knew the Entebbe airport and the surrounding area. So, he was sort of told by the guys organizing that rescue mission that he was coming along. He wasn't going to land with the commandos but he stayed in one of the C-130s flying above the airport sort of telling the guys on the ground what they would find...if you turn right in this corridor this is what you are going to see, etc. He was also the bankroller because they had to land in Nairobi to refuel these C-130s on the way back. He said it was funny because he had this huge wad of dollar bills to pay for the gas. So they landed early in the morning in Nairobi after getting out of Uganda, and there wasn't much going on. They just got off and started wandering around looking for somebody to pay for the gas. He said they found somebody and they pumped the fuel. I think there were three planes involved. He asked how much cash they wanted for this and the guy told him something and he paid him and they flew back to Israel. He said that was a funny operation. He said everyone was pretty tense at the time because they didn't know that it was going to be as successful as it was. There was only one fellow killed and he was the older brother of Netanyahu. So, again, they can do things like that very successfully.

Q: You left there when?

TAYLOR: I left in 1988.

Q: And then where?

TAYLOR: We came back to the Department and I took a job in INR for a year as the person who was to watch the issue of Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan. By that time the Soviets had told us and said publicly that they were prepared to leave and that they were going to leave in February 1989. So, I was given the job of doing everything possible to stay abreast of all the information we had on this, including public statements by Gorbachev and intelligence information, to see whether the Soviets were really going to do that, because we thought that was a major element in improving our bilateral relationship. If they reneged on that, we would have been very disappointed in the broader bilateral and worldwide sense.

Q: It is February 27, 1996. You have this Afghanistan watching job. Could you describe what sort of information were we getting in? You were there for about a year?

TAYLOR: Yes, that is right. The last part of 1988 and the first part of 1989. It was actually in the office of Soviet Affairs in INR. So, it was looking at the thing from the Soviet point of view. And it included other portfolios like Asia and Japan, the Philippines and the Soviet policy there. But the bulk of the work was on the Afghanistan story.

We looked at it basically from Soviet foreign policy decision making process, as to whether they would carry out their pledge to militarily withdraw from Afghanistan in February, 1989. There were some people who mistrusted the Soviets so much that they said they, the Soviets, at a drop of the hat would renege on this pledge. They felt the Soviets had broken their pledge so many times before so why should we believe them now. So there were naysayers within the US government, but basically the general view was that at that time the relationship with the United States was so important for Gorbachev because of his interests he would be very, very hard pressed to make the decision not to withdraw from Afghanistan. It wasn't as if Afghanistan, itself, was such a costly adventure for the Soviets that they had to get out and that it had created domestic dissension to the extent that they unilaterally were going to decide to leave. Therefore the parallels to Vietnam were not valid, there were some parallels but not exactly, but it was in the overall world context and

especially the bilateral US/Soviet relationship context that Gorby felt he had to carry out this particular pledge.

Q: What was the thinking in Soviet INR about why he felt he had to do this?

TAYLOR: Probably credibility was his overall interest or value that he wanted to establish. Well, first of all, he had decided that it was just a costly adventure, Moscow had been there for ten years and had lost, I think the generally accepted figure now is about 20,000 dead, nobody knows how many wounded soldiers, and it had reached the point where the regime was on very, very shaky ground. From the beginning they had imposed a limit on themselves of about 150,000 troops, so they felt at that level they couldn't exactly win a war, you can never really win a war like that and they were unwilling to put in a million troops which would have occupied the whole country and assured the Soviet Army's presence for a long, long time. They could have done it, but they had decided against that kind of commitment. So, therefore, in my view when a lot of people say the Soviet Army was kicked out of Afghanistan, that is not true. They could have stayed if they had wanted to, if they had the will power to do so. They decided to withdraw, again because of the inherent cost of the policy and the fact that Gorby was building this reputation worldwide as a statesman, as a valued and valid interlocutor with the other great power. We all know the policies of glasnost and perestroika which couldn't be carried forward while at the same time carrying on this dirty little war in Afghanistan.

Q: Again, the question that arose when the first airborne division landed there, was what's in it for the Soviets? What are they doing there? It wasn't as though they were getting ready to seize Afghanistan in order to attack or get a Gulf port, or something like that. It didn't make much sense.

TAYLOR: No, it didn't make much sense at the time, and after ten years, I guess it occurred to the people in the Kremlin that it didn't make a whole lot of sense to continue pursuing this. The regime they had installed and that they were still supporting had

lost virtually all credibility with the outside world and most Afghans. And certainly the Mujahideen opposition movement had reached a point, with our assistance and Iranian, Saudi and Pakistani assistance, that it was clear that this was not a popular regime.

So, the justification for actually remaining there and getting more and more guys killed...the opposition in the Soviet Union never, of course, reached what it did regarding Vietnam in the United States...but we were beginning to get reports that wounded veterans, or veterans with psychological problems from their involvement in Afghanistan were beginning to form groups and there were incidents of demonstrations in various cities. It wasn't a mass movement, but there were indications that opposition to the war was growing within the Soviet Union.

Q: Moving into the Soviet INR, which is part of the whole Soviet watching establishment, which you had been out of...you had been looking at it from the other side, the NEA side...did you find both a different culture there, I am talking about within the State Department, and maybe a different perspective than you had been used to?

TAYLOR: The Soviet office in INR had a few FSOs in it, but the majority of the people serving there were long term tea leaf watchers, and readers of the Soviet scene. So, they were obsessed, of course, with all of the arcane indicators that you would get by reading newspapers and talking to some of the exile groups in New York and things of that sort. So, it didn't seem to have the broader outlook that most FSOs who had been exposed to a lot of different areas of the world and countries and other view points. It had that reputation of having a very closed kind of society. So, with this openness, this perestroika, Gorby was not someone they could read very well. He was a politician too much in the Western mold. So, they were not terribly comfortable with that. It broke the mold of Brezhnev and all the other guys who came after him.

It was heavily staffed on the foreign policy side, which I found unusual. There were only three or four guys responsible for internal affairs, what was happening inside the Soviet

Union. Whereas there were six or seven of us on the foreign policy side and we divided up the world geographically with a couple of functional things like disarmament, etc.

Q: Were there reflections of what was happening in the Soviet Union, any foresight of what lay ahead?

TAYLOR: No, absolutely not. Nobody had any, any idea as to what was going to happen. The events in Eastern Europe beginning in 1989, beginning with Poland and going on to Hungary and Czechoslovakia, were completely unforeseen in terms of the breadth of their impact and what it would do to Soviet control of Eastern Europe. By no means did anybody have any idea as to what was going to happen to the Soviet Union in terms of the break up of the Soviet Union. There was nobody writing anything about that. There was nobody talking about it or even just talking about it over coffee in the cafeteria...Could this possibly mean that? And, if they had said something like that the culture would have just laughed....

Q: This is one of those things that after the fact everybody understands it.

TAYLOR: I talked to a couple of guys after I retired and was doing a little consulting work, who were there in internal affairs and I said, “What was it like at that time?” They said they didn't know. Every morning when they got to the office they had to run and run and run just to try to explain what happened the night before. Nobody could predict what was going to happen the next day, that day. Things were happening so fast and they were so unprecedented. I guess that is what the problem is, we deal a lot on precedent in the intelligence business or analytical business and it was all so unprecedented. I still can't believe that here we are sitting here and the Soviet Union is gone.

Q: Yes, I do these oral histories and feel that maybe in a couple of years I am going to have to ask, could you please explain what a Soviet is? This dominated our entire career.

TAYLOR: Jumping ahead a little bit, but it is pertinent here, after I retired I had a consulting contract with one segment of the State Department specifically based on my Soviet background and knowledge of events and people and things like that. After about two years they just said, “Look, things have changed so much and you are not any longer on a day to day basis dealing with what is going on, so therefore you don't really have anything to offer.” I said, “You are absolutely right.” I couldn't cry about it because they were right. I just can't talk about what is going on there and what was going on there at the time of all of the changes in the early nineties. They felt they had to depend on the guys who are currently employed. It was really a bizarre time.

Q: Well, going back to your main brief, the Afghan war, what type of intelligence and information were you getting and how did you judge it?

TAYLOR: Well, a lot of it was again based upon the rumor mill in Kabul. We still had a post open, this was late 1988. In essence I think we had two reporting people, a charg# and one other guy, plus the rest were communicators and a couple of marines, a very small operation. And they were all confined to Kabul. Jon Glassman was there during most of the period when I was in INR, and he would meet with diplomats from other missions in Kabul and they would all exchange stories and rumors and report them back. That was our main source of information in terms of what was happening in Kabul. There were still nuggets that were being picked up by the intercept guys and we could try to fit them into the puzzle...troop movements, etc. And, by this time we had overhead intelligence, satellites, that provided certain information on military operations, which was valuable. I remember in one incident that the overhead confirmed the rumors coming out from Glassman and the guys in Kabul, that there had been a huge Soviet military operation that in effect could have been described as a massive atrocity near the main tunnel leading from Kabul over the mountains and through the mountains to the north for the route eventually of the evacuation of the main troops. They had used massive amounts of bombing and napalm to clear out every living creature along this route for miles and

miles around. The Soviet government denied there was any operation like that but our overhead proved that it had in fact taken place because you could see the destruction which included villages. So, we assumed that thousands of Afghans had been wiped out simply to secure the area around the major withdrawal route for the Soviet army.

So, that was the kind of information that was available. You had public Soviet statements from Gorby on down and assurances to our ambassadors in Moscow that this was going to take place. You had policy statements and speeches. So we would look at all of that and come out basically in agreement within the whole culture that they would in fact go ahead with the withdrawal.

Q: Once you have made that kind of commitment it doesn't pay, and Afghanistan just wasn't that important.

TAYLOR: That's right. They had set February 19, 1989 as the deadline for getting all of their troops out, so they had to begin this kind of thing along about November, 1988. When that date approached we were beginning to look for indications that movements were actually taking place. When those were picked up we watched all of that. They were beginning to move from their bases farther south. So, we watched all of that and gave constant updates to the leadership in the State Department that these were happening. I recall, however, that there were a few indications when something violent would happen, when a Soviet unit would be attacked by the Mujahideen or wiped out or had suffered casualties, or the Mujahideen would make statements about what they were going to do in Kabul when the Soviets left there, there would be hints from Soviet leaders of various kinds that maybe we should rethink this. We don't want to leave a mess behind. This isn't a Soviet defeat. Things of that sort. Then we would have to sort of run around and say, “Well, does this mean they are actually contemplating not going through with it?” By and large, we came to the conclusion that what they were looking for and the buzz word then became was a “decent interval.” They were after a face-saving period between the date of the withdrawal, February 19, and anticipated collapse of the government in Kabul. They

didn't want it to come so soon that it would besmirch the reputation of the Soviet army and Soviet policy makers in general. But, it could come afterwards because even the leadership in Moscow we had concluded by then had anticipated this regime would not last forever. The question became how long would it last, but that was a different issue from whether the Soviets would actually withdraw. What this decent interval would be became then the major question. We more or less concluded, well, maybe three or four months. If that regime could last for three or four months the Soviet regime could feel that they had done what they could and the regime just couldn't last. And then the question became would the regime last for that period of time and what do the Soviets think as it is basically a Soviet concern as to whether the regime would last sufficiently long that they would achieve their so called decent interval.

As I recall we got a memorandum of conversation between Secretary George Shultz and the Soviet Ambassador who had come in to make a plea for us to pressure the Mujahideen to cease and desist during this withdrawal period and not inflict further casualties and to give them a chance to get out with a minimum of losses. And, Shultz in this conversation used the term, “decent interval.”

Q: You might explain that this is what we hoped there would be in Vietnam when we left, we hoped there would be a “decent interval” before the South Vietnamese regime collapsed. And, of course, there was not.

TAYLOR: So, that is what we were looking at and as the withdrawal began I think then most people figured that once they started it, it would be very, very difficult to reverse. It would take a tremendous provocation for them to say stop the whole machinery now. And, that didn't occur. They did, in fact, get out reasonably smoothly and on time. There was a bizarre incident that one colonel was the last one to cross the river on February 19, and he made some kind of speech, sort of a macho on the Soviet side. They did, however, leave behind huge amounts of military equipment for the Afghan army to use...munitions, scud

missiles, etc....to protect themselves against the Mujahideen. They claimed that was not part of the agreement, to take out all of this equipment.

Basically, at that point, along very early in 1989, the focus then became how long would the regime last. Although that was not exactly my portfolio, I was asked to sit in on these discussions and participate given the background that I had had on the issue. That is one we missed. The general wisdom was that it might last at least a few weeks but a few months at most. It lasted for almost two years before it did collapse and Najibullah, the president, the leader at that time, fled into a compound in Kabul where he has been ever since—possibly the UN compound or one of the embassies there.

Essentially we were wrong on two points. We didn't recognize the strength to the cohesion of the Mujahideen that the Soviet presence provided. As long as they were shooting at Soviets, they were all very effective and reasonably united, as much as Afghans can be united on anything. And, once the Soviet left, the Mujahideen fractured into the various groups and began jockeying for position and actually killing each other and killing troops from the wrong group. So, we didn't know that the Soviet departure would cause such great problems for the Mujahideen and their cohesion in continuing their campaign against the regime.

The other thing we missed was we didn't really anticipate that there would be that many people, Afghans, young men, troops, who would remain loyal and continue fighting for the Afghan regime. We didn't have a lot of information on that. We didn't have sources who did interviews with Afghan GIs, that just didn't exist. But, in retrospect, it was quite easy to see that we just didn't know who these guys were who were willing to fight and die for the regime. The population of Kabul, which had swollen by then to several million people, there were half a million when I was there, also remained reasonably loyal to the regime. Not loyal in the sense that they were regime supporters, but they apparently did not want to be governed by the Mujahideen and all of the programs that they had announced from various headquarters as to what they would do once they took over. So, because that

regime was able to exist and survive for another couple of years using all of the tools that the Soviets had left behind in terms of military hardware and supplies and ammunition, plus playing on the fears of the main population of Kabul that a Mujahideen would mean just disaster for the people there. So, I guess you could say that we didn't get that one right.

Q: It was unfortunate, but our main concern went right back to the Soviets and what they were doing rather than the Afghans.

TAYLOR: And you have touched on another point, that Washington and the whole US government virtually, immediately lost interest in the whole story once the Soviets had left. Our main policy objective for ten years had been to bleed the Soviet army and get them out of Afghanistan and prove that they can be defeated by an indigenous guerrilla movement as well. Once we had achieved that, that was in effect the end of the story as far as policy makers were concerned. There was nothing that I ever saw from high levels that indicated much thought or consideration as to what American policy should be towards the Mujahideen or any kind of successor regime once the Soviets left. There were some memos and papers circulated at lower levels among NEA types who would argue about who we should support and who we should not support and things like that. But, it was not the kind of thing that was on George Shultz' agenda every day as to what American policy towards the Mujahideen should be. So, I think that also contributed to the various confusion in Afghanistan, itself.

Pakistan, for instance, came down on the side of a leader who was very anti-American and anti-West and it was almost impossible for anyone to advocate supporting him. We had information that Iranians were supporting a group in the central mountains that was really quite radical, and obviously anti-American, so how could we support them. So, there was a great deal of indecision, although it was not a decision that anybody at the very senior levels felt they had to make or even think about very much. The violence continued unabated. There was constant shelling and rocketing of Kabul and various places. The

fighting continued for two years and it is still continuing to this day. Nobody really can figure out what is going on. You read a story on page 20 of the Post every three or four months about what is going on in Afghanistan, so it has been lost.

Q: It sounds to me as if there were two things going. One, the Soviets had been our enemy for so long. We had gotten a bloody nose in Vietnam and there was a certain amount of delight when you see our principal enemy getting the same kind of bloody nose. There may have been differences, but still they had to get out. That just took care of that. The other one was, of course, the Soviet threat in that area had obviously receded and in other places because once they got a bloody nose, the same way after Vietnam we were careful about getting involved, the Soviets became careful about getting involved.

TAYLOR: That is right. Remember at the time I was talking about the Soviet invasion, I mentioned something about the correlation of forces, the belief in a lot of places that Marx was right and that world revolution was on the side of the communist ideology. Well, what happened in Afghanistan and the succeeding few years, obviously proved that the correlation of forces were not on the side of the communist ideology. So, all of this was a sort of snowballing effect and I think Gorby was glad to get that issue off of his agenda and focus on his internal political problems, in trying to stay in office and get reelected, and how fast do you go with your reforms. Obviously he miscalculated the latter. I don't know enough about the scene, even at this point, why he miscalculated so drastically, but he was eventually forced out of office. I think, frankly, that he will go down as one of the most important figures of the 20th century.

Q: Oh, yes. He was at the place at a certain time and kept it from turning really nasty.

TAYLOR: Why he was so unpopular with the rank and file, I don't quite know either. I can understand with the party rank and file, because he was in effect taking power from the party and moving it towards other institutions, sort of restructuring the perestroika effort, but the people also seemed to have a great deal of animosity towards him. He was much

more popular with us than with his own people. Maybe they foresaw what was coming and what was going to happen to their individual standard of living. I just don't know, it is a fascinating story. I think you need a few more years than we have had to look at this.

Q: You then retired when?

TAYLOR: I retired at the end of 1989. I continued in INR throughout 1989. They sort of gave me the Asia portfolio. The Japanese and Soviet dispute over those small islands north of Japan. What was Soviet policy towards South Korea going to be? Questions like that about things I didn't have a whole lot of background in, but they didn't have anybody else, so I just did that for another 6 or 8 months.

Q: I think one of the fascinating things is the Soviets' inability to make peace with Japan over these Kurile Islands which you would have thought they could have come up with a modus vivendi of some sort as a sop to the Japanese. What was your reading in the short time you were dealing with this, why?

TAYLOR: Briefly, it seemed to me that the issue remained impossible to resolve because the Soviet military on this issue considered those islands to be extremely important. That for them is a very sensitive area of the Soviet empire at one time, Russia now, and they felt they absolutely had to have them. This didn't make much sense to our military guys. From what I understand the Sea of Okhotsk, which is inside this string of islands, is the major staging base and area for the Soviet ICBM strategic submarine launching capability. They had to have absolute control to prevent penetration by our guys who would try to penetrate that sea and eliminate their “boomers”. That was the sensitivity of that whole region as witness the shooting down of the Korean Airliner in the early eighties. So, when I had that particular watch, Gorby was doing some internal maneuvering and trying to maintain his position of leadership, so I think he didn't want to alienate the military at that particular point by giving away sovereign Russian territory that they had conquered in World War II. Why that has remained such an intractable problem, I don't know, because

what I understand, most of the Soviet military doesn't even operate now. The submarines can't get out of port, and if they go down they don't come up. So, I don't know why that is such a difficult problem, because they do need foreign investment and especially in Siberia. There were always indications from the Japanese side that they were prepared to do all kinds of joint ventures in Siberia with the Soviets. They had all that capital in those days. I guess they still have some but it is less now. But, they were willing to if there could be some settlement concerning those four small islands. I think Gorby, if I recall, visited Japan while I had this job on a state visit, and the subject came up but was sort of brushed aside. It has prevented the signing of any kind of peace treaty between Japan and the Soviet Union.

So, 1989 was my last year. I went out on January 1, 1990 and became an independent spouse.

Q: Does your wife continue in the Foreign Service?

TAYLOR: She is in the Foreign Service for USIA and from 1992-95 she was assigned to Rabat and I went along and had a great time. She was cultural affairs officer there and is now back here in Washington as the Executive Secretary of USIA, the S/S Director, so to speak. What happens in the future, we will just have to see. I am not sure we want to go overseas again at this point, having spent so many years outside. Every move, as you know, gets more and more difficult. We are still not unpacked after eight months. I remember thirty years ago it was a great adventure.

Q: I thought at my last post every time I would sit down in the living room I would look around and try to figure out how much everything weighted in order to pack the damn things.We had an earthquake while in Naples and if it had all gone I would have thought, "Well, shucks!"

TAYLOR: I recall when I was a JOT going to Tehran, I think I had two suitcases and about two hundred pounds of airfreight and that was it. No surface shipment or nothing. Now we are up to about 8,000 pounds or something.

Q: Well, I want to thank you very much, Jim. This is great.

End of interview